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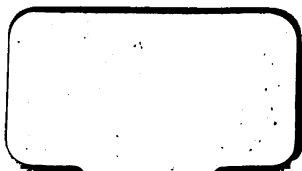
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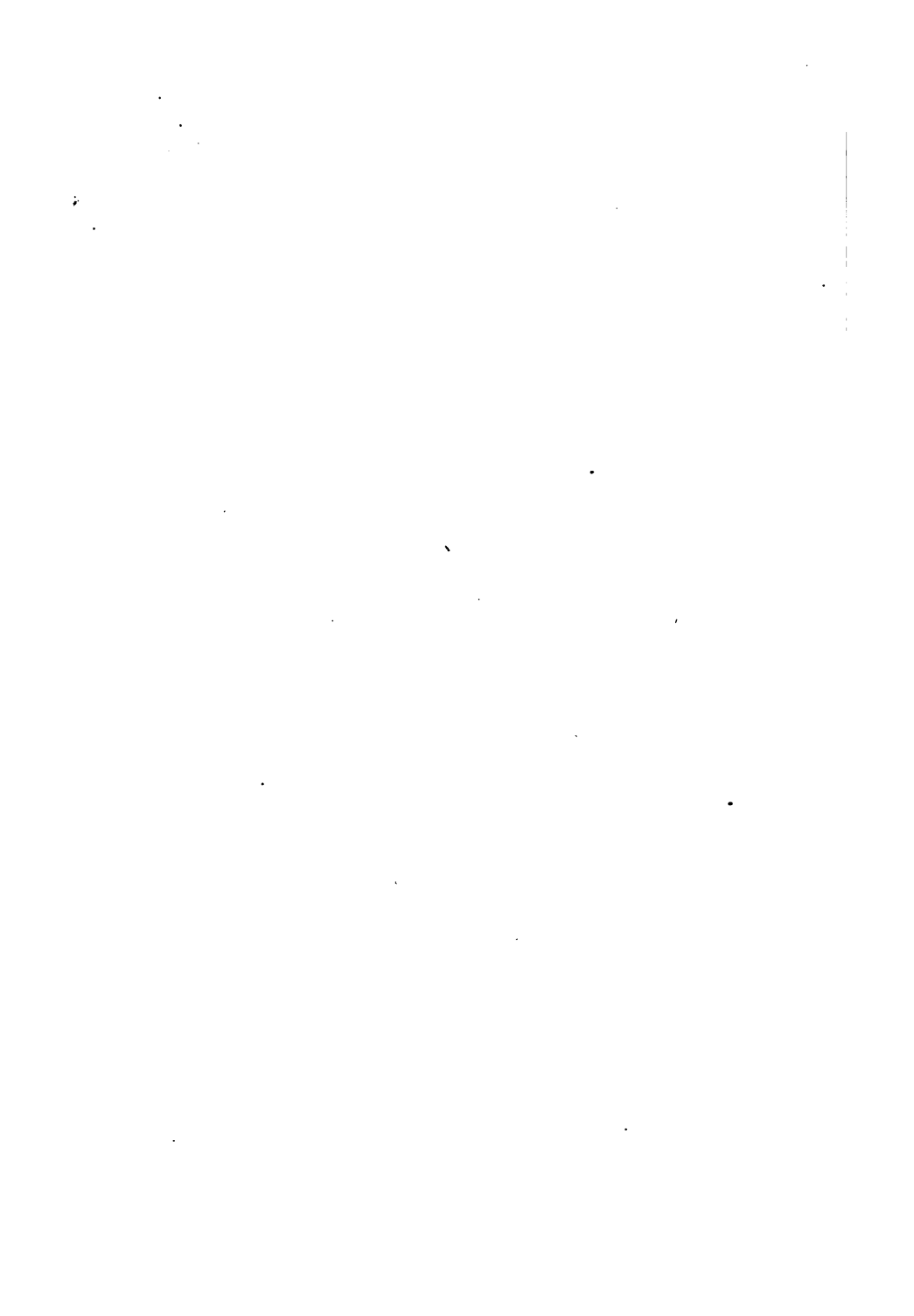
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A SAPPHIRE RING,

And other Stories.

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A SAPPHIRE RING,

And other Stories.

By RICHARD DOWLING,

AUTHOR OF 'THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART,' 'THE HUSBAND'S SECRET,'
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.	A SAPPHIRE RING (<i>continued</i>).	PAGE
XXI.	WE MUST BE BROTHERS	I
XXII.	NEXT DAY	13
XXIII.	THE BRIDEGROOM'S PRESENT TO THE BRIDE	25

THE CASTLE ON THE CLIFF.

I.	THE HEIR RELIEVED	39
II.	AN INVITATION ACCEPTED	58
III.	THE PALACE OF ART	74
IV.	LUNCHEON AT THE GOG AND MAGOG	92
V.	MR. POLLOCK AT BERKHAM	105
VI.	IN THE WOOD	119
VII.	SUITOR AND FATHER	131
VIII.	'WHAT HAS BECOME OF JACK?'	145
IX.	A GENTLE MATE	160
X.	MOTHER AND DAUGHTER	178
XI.	'ACROSS THE WALNUTS AND THE WINE'	189
XII.	DETAILS	200
XIII.	IN THE DARK	212
XIV.	'TWO THOUSAND POUNDS!'	224
XV.	A QUARTETTE	239
XVI.	WHEN LOVE IS BUSINESS	257

A SAPPHIRE RING.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE MUST BE BROTHERS.

WHEN the two cousins got back to the library, they found Pender still standing by the table where they had left him. Since they had closed the bedroom door on the old man neither had spoken. Neither of them had yet had time to realise the awful position in which the sailor's words had placed Mr. Leuthwait. It never for a moment occurred to either of them to doubt the stranger. The truth of his words flashed into their minds instantly. Each was sure

that Walter had not done the crime. No one had before, at or since the trial been able to suggest another person who could possibly have any motive for scuttling the barque. But both men saw at a glance the motive which Mr. Leuthwait might have for making it seem that Walter had committed the crime.

‘Sit down,’ said Evelyn to Pender. ‘Let us lock the door and have a chat. If you care to smoke, you may.’

‘Thank you, sir, I will if you gentlemen are going to smoke and if you wouldn’t think it a liberty.’

‘Now, first and foremost, Walter, let us put ourselves ship-shape. What is this man’s name?’

‘Mr. Evelyn Leuthwait, Arthur Pender, able seamen,’ said Walter.

‘Mercy on us, sir! you are not Mr.

Leuthwait's son? cried Pender, in profound astonishment.

‘Yes, I am. Did you not know where you were coming with my cousin?’

‘No, sir. He only said he was going to see people who were interested in the affair, and that he'd ask me to speak of what I saw.’

‘I am young Leuthwait, as they call me, and the old man who sat there is my father.’

‘Well, sir, all I say is may I be—— if I thought anything of the sort. I'd have been sorry to speak as I did if I knew who he was, for he was ever and always a good employer and a kind master. Well, I'm blown!’

‘We must not think of the good employer or the kind master now, we have other things of more consequence to speak of. What you said is true, is it?’

‘Yes, sir, as true as daylight. But I’m sorry I spoke.’

‘We are much better off than before you spoke. Now we know exactly where we are.’

‘We needn’t make it a lee coast in a gale, sir.’

‘We shall see, we shall see. Whom have you told of this?’

‘No one but the present company and Captain Salmon.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Strike me dead if I’m a liar.’

‘Now, tell us all about that night. What you saw; how it came about you saw it.’

‘Well, sir, one of my old chums was working in your father’s yard, a Connington man, sir, same as myself; and the very evening before all the men were called to

the boiler I slipped into the yard to have a few words with my old chum. I knew it was against all rules and orders for anyone to go in there except on business, or with leave from the proprietor. Well, sir, I found my friend. He was working in one of the sheds to the east end of the barque. While I was there all the hands were called away, Joe Bannister, that's my chum, with the rest.

‘I did not intend trying to get out until the men were going, as the man at the gate would be sure to ask what business I had there, and I had no answer to give him. As I had been knocking about all that day, and had a few pints, I thought I'd turn in. So I found a nice heap of shavings at one end of the shed, and I threw myself on it and fell asleep. When I awoke the men were gone. While I had been asleep they

had hoisted the boiler aboard the lighter. They had come back for their coats and had gone away.

‘It was not quite dark then. I looked out of the shed, and the first thing I noticed was Mr. Langley here. I didn’t know his name or who he was when I saw him, although Joe Bannister often spoke to me of him—I say I saw him overhauling the barque about the sternport and counter. He was only two fathoms off, so I could see him well enough, and I remember thinking at the time that if he found me and we grappled, we’d be about a match. And I remember thinking at the same time that there was a look of each other about our figureheads (Mr. Langley had hair on his face, and longer hair on his head then), for I wonder if he did find me out, and we grappled, would the yard men in the

dark be able to know the right man to hit.'

Said Evelyn, 'I am quite sure you could identify my cousin. What happened after that?'

'After that, when it got dark, Mr. Langley went aboard the barque, and after a while I saw him lingering about the timbers that weren't yet planked, but most of the time he was aboard I couldn't see him because he was down in the hold. After a while he went away.'

'Did you notice any treenail holes open?'

'Yes, a lot.'

'Well?'

'Well, sir, when Mr. Langley was gone a while, I begun to think of getting out of the place. So I started off for the main gate, thinking to climb over it. As soon

as I got to the office I saw there was a light in it. This made me afraid to make any noise at the gate, for whoever was inside could not help hearing me if he was awake. So I thought I'd see if he was sleeping. I got over to the window without making a noise. There was no curtain or blind on the window, but I could not see in, for there was one of the large boards they glue plans of ships to across the window. There were bars across the window, and I hove myself up until I could see in.'

Pender paused here as though reluctant to go on.

'Well,' said Evelyn, 'what did you see then?'

'I saw the gentleman you know of breaking up rifle cartridges with a kind of wooden marlin spike. I saw a rifle in a corner, and I got a great start, thinking the

gentleman might have heard me. I slipped down and headed as well as I knew in the dark for the shed; I thought I could hide myself in the shavings. But I kept a bright look out, and in about an hour I saw the gentleman come out with a lantern. I gave myself up for lost. But instead of heading for me he made for the barque, and there and then, gentlemen, I saw what you know.'

'How long did he take about it?'

'I could not tell you exactly; maybe four or five hours. It was a long watch.'

'He must have worked very hard.'

'He worked like a madman, sir. I saw it all from start to finish, but had no notion what it could be about. I never had any notion the vessel was to be sent to sea with the treenail holes served in that way. When the gentleman went away I waited a while, and then went after him and got over the

gate. I turned into a field and had a watch below, and then left Lanmouth, a place I didn't see since until this morning.'

For a long time no one spoke.

At last Evelyn stared across the table at Langley, and asked,

'What are you going to do, Walter?'

'About what?' asked Walter, in an abstracted manner.

'About my unfortunate father?'

'The man who kept me when I hadn't a shilling, and made a man of me afterwards?'

'And robbed Helen and deliberately locked you up in jail on a false charge that he might rob you of her and her of you?'

'The question is a very important one; it's late now and we have all had a long day.'

'That is true. You are now master of the situation.'

‘Yes, we shall all be cooler and wiser to-morrow. You can put up Pender and me?’

‘Of course.’

‘Helen is in bed?’

‘Hours ago.’

‘Then I think we had better follow her example. Pender has agreed to act as my servant for the present.’

‘And proud to do it,’ said Pender.

When each had found a room, and when Walter was about to throw himself into bed, Evelyn entered the room. He went over to Walter and took his hand.

‘Walter, you won’t expose the old man?’

‘Damn it, Evelyn, you don’t suppose both sides of the family produced a heartless scoundrel.’

Leuthwait turned and walked towards the door.

Langley called out, 'Evelyn, Evelyn, come back. This day has been too much for me. I did not mean it.'

Evelyn turned rapidly and came back with hand outstretched, 'And yet you might have meant it with perfect justice.'

'No, no, Evelyn; no, no. From this moment we must not be of different sides of the house—we must be brothers.'

Each pressed the hand of the other.

At that moment an alarmed shriek sounded from the floor below.

'My mother or Helen,' said Evelyn, as both rushed to the door.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEXT DAY.

WHEN Walter and Evelyn reached the floor below, they found the door of Mr. Leuthwait's room open, and from that room they heard the sound of wailing.

'Something wrong with my father,' said Evelyn, as they crossed the threshold.

Mrs. Leuthwait was sitting in a chair at the head of the bed.

'What's the matter, mother?' asked Evelyn.

Walter stood in the shadow of a curtain. No doubt his uncle had told his wife of his arrival, but the sudden sight of him might give her a shock.

'Look at your father; oh, look at him!'

Evelyn went hastily to the bed. The chin had dropped, the eyes were open and dilated. Evelyn listened attentively; he could hear no sound. He put his hand over the region of the heart; he could feel no throb.

‘Mother, mother, have courage. Try and make him take some brandy, and I will run for help. I’ll call up the servants. It may be only a worse faint than the last!’

‘No, Evelyn, he’s dead; I know he’s dead. Ah, Evelyn, what a life, and what an ending to it.’

From these words Evelyn knew his father had told his mother all. ‘Hush, mother. Let us say nothing yet. Let us hope he has only fainted. Here; try to make him swallow this.’ He had brought some brandy up to the room before, and poured out some, and handed her the glass.

He knew the old man was dead, but every chance ought to be tried before they gave up efforts to restore him.

As Evelyn left the room he drew Walter after him, saying, 'I don't think anyone but us heard the scream; I am now going to ring the people up. You must not be seen. Run away to your own room. I'm nearly sure it's all over.'

They were at the head of the stairs by this time. Evelyn ran down and rang the dinner-bell, and waited until one of the men appeared, and having told him what was the matter, started at the top of his speed for a doctor.

Walter went up to his room and sat down by the window to try and think. It was now daybreak. He thought:

'From last daybreak to this what a crowd of events in my life! Imprisonment,

escape, freedom. The supreme deliverance greater than all else, contained in Pender's information. My daring to land once more. My arrival here. Pender's still more extraordinary information, and my unfortunate uncle's death. What a day in a lifetime. I feel, as though it must be a week, ay, a month, since last night, when I waited in the dark and counted the minutes until it would be time to begin my descent.

‘And now, what am I to do? What will Helen think of my return? Of my uncle's crime. Who will believe Pender now that my uncle is gone? No Home Secretary that ever lived would listen to the uncorroborated word of Pender. I never thought of that before. This is the biggest difficulty of all. I had not intended to expose my uncle in his life-time, but I had

fully intended that I should be able to vindicate myself when he was dead. I am worse off than ever! Worse off than ever! Fool that I was not to go on with Salmon! A Sapphire got me into my great trouble, and a Sapphire got me out of it, and now I have given up the second Sapphire, the friendly one. Shall I fall into the toils of the old ones again? It looks very like as if I should. Confound me, what an idiot I have been!

‘And Helen. I wonder when shall I see Helen? I wonder where shall I see my Helen, my dark-eyed darling, my gentle love? I wonder what she will wear? I wonder shall I hear the rustle of her dress before I see her? I wonder shall I hear her voice before I set eyes on her? I wonder shall I meet her when no one else is by? Yes, there must be no one else

near. In the present state of affairs in this house it would never do for any third person to be with us. Ah, Helen . . . Sweet Helen!

His thoughts became fragmentary, and the images in his mind ill-defined; and in a few seconds, overcome by the fatigues and anxieties of the day, he fell into a profound, dreamless sleep.

When he awoke it was close to noon. He opened his door noiselessly, and stole down the passage cautiously to Evelyn's room. He found his cousin there.

'I guessed you'd come here when you awoke,' said Evelyn, 'so I told them below that if they wanted me they were to come here. I too have had a sleep. The doctors say he has died of heart disease of long standing.'

'And how is your mother?'

‘Quite broken down, as you may imagine. He told her all before he died.’

‘Did he? It must have been an awful blow to her.’

‘Awful. I am sure she would not have believed it from any other person. She would as soon have thought of doubting the Bible as his word. Walter, what has happened seems to me all for the best.’

‘Well, Evelyn, it looks almost cruel to say so; but after the discovery of last night no matter what precautions we might take the poor old governor would be always in dread of discovery. Life for him would be a living death.’

‘It would be nothing better; and as for me, I don’t think I could stay here. The money part of the affair was bad enough. But the matter of the barque was too dreadful to live near. Anyway, Walter,

there's one good thing, you can now clear yourself.'

'Well, I have just been thinking of that, and I am greatly afraid we are in a more difficult position than before.'

'Nonsense.'

Langley then told him the thoughts which had run through his mind when he was alone in his room early this morning.

'Yes,' said Evelyn reflectively, 'that does make it look ugly. Of course we could not think of asking my mother to confirm Pender's account of the affair.'

'I'd as soon ask her to jump into the sea. No. But you see things are no better than they were: rather worse. By the way, what have you done with Pender? It won't do to have him running about the house more than myself.'

'No. I've taken care of that. I told

him he'd have to stay in his room all day, and that I'd bring him anything he wanted. I locked the door on the outside, and have put the key in my pocket. I told Mrs. Drayton that I did not wish any one of the rooms on the corridor to be touched to-day, and that they were all locked and the keys had been taken out of them. So when you go back to your room you had better lock the door and take the key out.'

'I will, Evelyn. Pender and I must leave this place to-night.'

'I think it would be better than stopping here. Get across the Channel. The town is full of your escape this morning. It appears the men on the tower did see the schooner, but thought nothing of her then or until after the fellows came back from chasing me. Nor even did it occur to them you had got off in her until hours after-

wards. They say Government will send a gunboat in pursuit; but as they do not know her name, and the men who saw her took no particular notice of her, their chance of picking her up is very small. They all say that father's death was caused by the shock of hearing you had escaped, and the doctors say that would have been more than sufficient to account for all. There is not, of course, the least suspicion of how my father's financial affairs are—'

'And there never shall be,' said Langley, holding out his hand with emotion to Leuthwait.

'I know. I can't pay back all the money, and that the business is not worth more than half what I whispered to you last night. But all I can do I will do.' Helen shall have the business, and I'll go to Australia. Nothing shall move me from that

‘You may give it to Helen if you like, but if I ever have control over it I shall take very good care that I give it back to you. But it will be time enough to settle all that by and by. Helen knows I am here?’

‘Yes, I told her.’

‘I suppose I may see her. It would be as well, I think. I did not see aunt.’

‘I don’t think it would be just as well you did see my mother. She is cruelly tried by the loss of him and the awful confession he made. Of course you must see Helen. The best place will be in my mother’s little work room at the end of this corridor. Then you will not have to come down-stairs; and as the servants have no business to-day on this floor, there is no chance of anyone hearing and recognising your voice. I’ll come back to you later

in the day. You'll find something to eat and drink on the table there.'

'All right,' said Walter, as Evelyn left the room. 'Ask Helen to come as soon as she can.'

He listened with the door ajar. At length came the rustling of a woman's dress. He drew the door open, and, stepping out, caught the figure of a woman as it passed.

'My darling! my own Helen!'

'O, Walter. What an unexpected—
what an awful meeting!'

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S PRESENT TO THE BRIDE.

LATER that day, the day after Walter Langley made his escape from Blacklawn Convict Prison, Evelyn came to him, saying, 'I have good news for you. Among my father's papers we have found one in his own handwriting, and addressed to me. It is in fact a full and honest confession of the whole affair, and the only thing he can say in extenuation is that he thinks he must have been mad at the time.'

'I am quite sure he was.'

'Now, old Parr, who drew my father's will, thinks that this confession would be almost sure to get a pardon, when backed

up by Pender's evidence, but for your having broken jail.'

'And does he see no way out of that difficulty?'

'He says he does not recollect a case of exactly similar character. The men who break jail are generally guilty, and the men who have got pardons have been innocent and never attempted to break jail. How the double difficulty will act on the mind of the Home Secretary is a thing no one can tell. The whole case will be laid before the judge who tried the case, and the judge's report will have a great deal to do with the decision of the Home Secretary.'

'And what does he recommend to be done?'

'What he recommends (for I told him the whole case) is that you assume the name you were to have gone by in the

Sapphire, John Russell, and represent yourself as a sailor who had come into a little money, and had in consequence of the money not gone abroad. So that the clothes you have on will just do. You are to walk from this to London, avoiding big towns, driving hard bargains at every inn you come too. When you get to London your hair and beard will have grown, and you will have got a travel-stained appearance. You can there buy a bag and chest, and write a letter to yourself, asking you to go over and join an English ship which you knew to be in a French port. Show this to some of the sailors aboard the steamer, and ask their opinion of the thing. When you get to France make your way as quickly as you can and any way you like over the Pyrenees. Then you are to wait until you hear from me.'

‘How on earth am I to hear from you until you know where I am?’ said Langley, who, as the scheme was unfolded to him, looked more and more helpless and hopeless.

‘You are to telegraph to me under an assumed name when you have reached some quiet village in Spain. Any name—anything you can think of—will do. Such as “If favoured with order shall have best attention.” Then don’t go from whatever village you telegraph from, and wait until you get a letter from me.’

‘But why am I to assume the name of John Russell before all others? Does not that look like jumping into the lion’s den?’

‘Don’t you see it has everything to recommend it. If they overhaul the Sapphire they will see Russell’s name on the papers,

and if they ever trace that name to you the name and the record will coincide. John Russell has lost all his papers while on a spree, but if they telegraph to Cardiff they will be able to know all about John Russell. Then if you are overhauled you can refer them to Cardiff, where they will find the story of your having shipped is true, and that your record is correct, and that the man who shipped as John Russell corresponded to you. For you know a real man did ship as John Russell, and John Russell's record is the one you are to refer to.'

'But if the real John Russell turns up I shall be in a trap.'

'My dear Walter you must recollect that we allowed Salmon to arrange all this branch of the affair, and that Salmon is no fool.'

'I know Salmon is no fool. But how

is he to prevent the real Russell turning up and claiming my record?’

‘Because the real John Russell has been dead and buried upwards of two months, and was personated at the Shipping Office.’

‘But if the man who personated John Russell informed?’

‘Now look here, Walter, we can’t go on with this for ever. The man who personated broke the law, and is he likely to tell upon himself? It would do him no good to inform, and the chances are ten thousand to one against his ever hearing of any connection between the schooner Sapphire and Walter Langley. What we think a very good programme has been laid down for you, and I am quite sure you will do well to follow it. Old Parr says that of course making out a programme such as this is

unprofessional; but in his personal relations he always put justice before law, and he regards this a personal affair done out of consideration for the memory of my unfortunate father, whom he knew so long and prized so highly. He agrees with us in thinking the old man must have been mad since the time he began those enormous speculations.'

According to this arrangement Walter Langley set out on his way to London that night. It was settled that Pender was to leave Lanmouth under cover of darkness, go to London, and wait there until he was wanted.

But the surprises of this case were not yet over.

It took three weeks for Walter Langley to reach London. To play his part consistently he was obliged to take a squalid

room in a mean, low river-side lodging-house, where every sense was outraged each minute. Here was low life in all its hideous squalor and low vice in all its brazen, tawdry finery. Here were streets men feared to go down, and yet in which women lived. Here were cursing and brawling and drunkenness in the room, and the air thick with vague hints of unknown ill odours and suggestions of odious vice.

The place reminded Langley of that awful charnelhouse of souls on Blacklawn. But Wapping, with all its physical and moral uncleanness, was to his mind Paradise compared to that den of thieves by the sea. Here, despite the recklessness and the sin, was humanity. Here you might see the meanest and the most degraded do kindly offices for others. There was no-

thing at Blacklawn but adamantine selfishness that knew no relenting.

Walter Langley was delighted to get away when his time had come, and he found himself without let or adventure safely ashore at Boulogne. Here he bought the few necessities he wanted and went on from Boulogne to Paris. At Paris he got a more elaborate outfit and proceeded thence over the Pyrenees to Irun, and from Irun to the small village of Cucharra hard by, where he prepared to live.

In reply to his telegram came the astounding news that not a penny of Helen's fortune had been touched, except what the old man had from time to time given to her or expended on her account. All her business affairs were as regular as if they had been kept by the Bank of England. Old Parr had, formerly, been taken fully into

confidence, and now the two doctors had been allowed to know that Mr. Leuthwait had lost the bulk of his own fortune, and that he had been under the delusion he had encroached on moneys confided to his care, but that the latter belief was wholly without foundation. The opinion of all three was that these losses, operating on a brain already overtaxed, had been too much for it, and that delusion and (added old Parr privately) mania had been the result.

As soon as Langley was known to be in comparative safety at Cucharra, near Irun, the whole case was placed before the Home Secretary. There were great difficulties in the way. The jail-breaking was a bad difficulty, and it now turned out that Pender's story was confirmed by that of a man then labouring under a delusion, and a man who had moreover suffered from mania at

the time of the attempt to scuttle. Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State did not see his way to a free pardon ; but as the case was very peculiar—indeed, unique—if the convict remained abroad for a few years, three or four, no doubt the police would not consider it their duty to interfere further with his liberty as far as the two offences cited were concerned.

Evelyn Leuthwait has since that year carried on successfully, and is still carrying on, the old business at Lanmouth. That year Walter and Helen were married abroad, the bridegroom's present to the bride being a SAPPHIRE RING.

THE CASTLE ON THE CLIFF.

THE CASTLE ON THE CLIFF.

CHAPTER I.

THE HEIR RELIEVED.

BERKHAM CASTLE, or the Castle on the Cliff, as it is locally called, stands on the top of an abrupt eminence in a midland county. The building is one of the oldest of its kind in the country, and occupied its present site when the Wars of the Roses were young. It has no pretensions to architectural elegance, and was built for defence, not ornament. It is a solid block consisting of 'four square walls and four square towers,' with a large courtyard in the middle. Three of these walls had been

built for purely military purposes. The fourth, which crowned an inaccessible side of the hill, is formed by the Castle proper, that is to say, the apartments where the owner, his family and retainers live.

Ten years ago, the owner of Berkham Castle was Henry Edward Granley, twelfth Earl of Berkham, a thin, withered, tottering, shattered man of forty-eight. The rent roll of the estate was fifteen thousand a year; but the owner came into the property young, and squandered money broadcast, and threw himself recklessly into every kind of dissipation.

When he could no longer get another loan on the property, he paused to look round him for a wife, a rich wife; one whose fortune would not only be enough to pay off his debts, but to leave a handsome surplus.

He kept quiet for a little time, and those who knew him best thought he had reformed.

His eyes fixed finally on Caroline Neathford, the orphan heiress of a rich ship-builder of Glasgow. She and her guardians approved of his suit; and when she was nineteen and he twenty-four she became Countess of Berkham.

He was not quite satisfied with the result of this marriage, for when business matters came to be discussed, he found she had not as large a fortune as he had thought.

He did not, however, back out of the marriage.

He was greatly pressed for money at the time; he knew no other heiress who had more than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, the dower Miss Neathford would

bring him; so he went through the ceremony and completed the sacrifice.

No sooner, however, had he secured the money he wanted, than he dropped all dissimulation, ceased to display any tenderness towards his wife, and once more plunged into all his former irregularities.

His young wife was made of stuff too stern to allow of her breaking her heart over her unruly lord; and when her boy Oliver, and girl Lenore, had come in the first four years of her married life, she abandoned all hope of his reclamation, and made her mind up to accept the inevitable with a smile rather than a frown.

Her daughter, Lenore, had now reached her twentieth year, and her son, in a cavalry regiment, his twenty-second.

Lady Berkham was a tall, comely, English matron of forty-three. Despite all her

worries and miseries, she had preserved, not only her good looks, but a sprightliness of manner and an appearance of youth.

Whatever love she once felt for her husband had long since died out. She looked on him with a little pity, a little scorn. She did not think him fully responsible for his words or acts. She never tried to reason with him or question any of his proposals, so long as they did not affect her or her children; and when, in the latter case, he became peremptory, and she had no alternative but submission, she gave in with a smile and a toss of her head.

The happiest days of her life were those spent with her children when her husband was off on his wild career, spending recklessly the money which had once been hers.

For years she had not been in London;

she had declined to go, and had led a perfectly quiet secluded life at Berkham Castle.

While Oliver, Lord Balehouse, was a lad, he had, of course, spent much of his time at school, and while he was at home much of his leisure had been devoted to sport and out-of-door amusement. Now he was with his regiment, and saw his mother and his sister but seldom, and his father hardly ever. He and his father had never got on well together. The son thought his father a sneak, and the father regarded his son as a boisterous puppy. The feeling of son to father was not improved when the latter decided he could not afford to keep his son in the Blues, and made him join a regiment of hussars on an allowance of three hundred a year.

From the fact that, after the first few years of her married life, the Countess of

Berkham went little into society, and rarely visited London, and that she lived almost wholly with her children, the relations between them and her were more intimate than is usual among people of similar rank.

Although the mother had, during the youth of her children, carefully abstained from making to them any depreciating statements respecting the Earl, they had themselves gathered, from what they saw and heard in his presence and in the presence of others, more than enough to fill their minds with anything but love or respect for their father.

All these facts put together, naturally drew the bonds between mother and daughter very close. For the purposes or ordinary intercourse they were more like sisters than mother and daughter. Each consulted the other on all the points that

arose to either; and as the management of the castle was left wholly in the hands of the Countess, provided she kept within certain limits of expense, the two women had continually matters of more or less importance to decide.

Lady Lenore Granley was tall and slender, and compact of figure. Although there was no colour in her cheek, she looked the picture of health. Her forehead was white, and low, and broad; her cheeks round and full, her lips firm and red, her eyes round and of a dazzling blue. She had a well-cut aquiline nose, and fine soft light-brown hair, fitting close to a neat head.

She was not a great beauty in the sense that the head of Clytie is beautiful, and yet she was beautiful, rather perhaps by reason of her look and mien of repose and intellectual grace.

Her brother, Lord Balehouse, was in many respects in powerful contrast with his sister. He was tall, well padded with flesh, considering he was only twenty-two years of age, and light-hearted and jovial. His career at college had been anything but brilliant. He had been good at cricket, football, and boxing; he could row, shoot, and wrestle. But, although he had tried honestly for a little while, he could get no Latin, Greek, or mathematics worth speaking of into his head. But he was the prince of good fellows, and he had not joined the hussars a month before he had become one of the most popular men in the regiment.

Popularity is an excellent and a pleasant thing; but when the object of popularity is a young subaltern of hussars—good-looking, pleasant, and free, and the possessor of three hundred a year, and a

few shillings a day pay, the result is inevitable.

Thus it was that, at the end of two years' service, and when the regiment was stationed at Canonbury, a cathedral town within easy reach of London, Lord Balehouse found himself considerably in debt, and exceedingly uncomfortable and harassed.

Balehouse was not a very vicious young man. He hadn't a single mean instinct. He played cards a little, with poor luck. Naturally he cared nothing for cards; but all the other fellows played, and he did not wish to look remarkable. But although he never played for high stakes, he lost more frequently than won.

He did take a deep interest in horses, and would have kept racers if he had had the means. When all the men around him

were betting, he could not resist the temptation to lay a fiver here and there, and, as with young men, he almost invariably backed a horse, and with the usual result.

There were men around him who had six, eight, ten thousand a year; and as he was very young and imprudent, an allowance of three hundred a year was absolutely ridiculous; and he knew next to nothing of money: all of which combined helped him into two thousand pounds of debt.

Where to turn for money he did not know. He would as soon have thought of writing to the man in the moon as his father. What should he do? Nothing would induce him to go to the Jews. His father had told him, in plain set words, that if he did not contrive to live on the three hundred a year and his pay, he might add to his income in any way he chose, but that

he was not to have the faintest hope of paternal help.

The young man had no relative whatever on his mother's side. Not one of his father's family was on terms of intimacy with his people. He knew his mother had control of a bare eight hundred a year, out of which it was impossible she could spare him anything; and indeed, if he thought, by pinching or denying herself or Lenore some luxury, she could extricate him from his difficulty, he would not have allowed her to do so.

From the very first he had liked the captain of his troop.

This Captain Jervais was a stout, plain, energetic, commonplace man, whose father had been in business. Jervais never sought to conceal the fact that his father had been in trade, and, as he was very well able to

take care of himself in conversation, and was thoroughly honourable, his brother officers let him alone a few months after he joined, and now there was no man in the regiment whom brother officers would less think of paining.

Young Balehouse made up his mind one night to place his case before Jervais, and seek advice.

Next day, after parade, he went to the captain's quarters, and put the whole case frankly and freely before his senior, and asked what he would, privately and as a friend, recommend.

'Bad affair, bad affair,' said the captain briskly. 'Your father has not behaved well in making you such a poor allowance. You can't live on it by any possibility, except in the line. And then you ought not to have gone in so heavy. Two thousand in two

years isn't much, provided your allowance was anywhere near it; but, confound it, two thousand six hundred, when you had only the odd money, is too much. And he swore, when he paid those few hundreds at college, that he'd never stump up again? Bad, Balehouse, bad! But let me see if anything can be done. I haven't got two thou—'

'My dear fellow, if you had twenty thousand—'

'Don't be a fool! I say I haven't the money myself; but, as the money-lenders say, perhaps I know a man who could lend the tin if he would.'

'I should be awfully obliged—'

'Hold on, Balehouse—hold on, my boy. I have only to take up that pen, and say, "Dear Jones, lend *Lord* Balehouse two thousand," and the thing is done.'

‘Then for heaven’s sake—’

‘Sit quietly on your chair, my boy. I may tell you at once I intend getting you the money.’

‘My dear Jervais, I shall be for ever grateful.’

‘I don’t intend remaining satisfied with a promise of gratitude.’

‘*Promise!*’ repeated the young man, with a little indignation.

‘Balehouse, if you and I are to talk business, we must keep cool. If I am to get you this money, I intend to have a commission on it.’

‘A commission, Jervais! a commission!’ The young man coloured still more deeply, and became very uncomfortable. ‘My dear Jervais, I would rather not have the money at all than put you in so unpleasant a position as that of discussing such a matter.’

‘Balehouse, give me your hand; what you have said shows you are the right sort. I do not mean to make money out of you, lad; I want to save you some. Come, sit here and write what I dictate.’

Lord Balehouse drew his chair to the table, took up a pen, set a sheet of paper before him, and awaited in wonder for the next words of his captain.

‘Now,’ said Jervais, ‘write down the date.’

That was done.

‘And then, “I pledge my word of honour, as an officer and a gentleman, not to bet on any race or play a card for twelve months from this date.—Balehouse.”’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you signed it?’

‘I have.’

‘Now, if you are willing to give me my

commission, I am willing to get you the money.'

'But you have not yet told me what that commission is. What is it?'

'That paper you have just signed.'

The young man paused awhile and pondered. After a few seconds' thought, he said,

'But won't it look awfully silly if I don't bet or play?'

'No doubt the men will notice it, and the fools will joke at it; but you will be much safer if you do what I propose.'

'You're making it very hard lines for me, Jervais.'

'I thought you were now in a deuce of a hole?'

'So I am—awful!'

'Well, if you want to get out of that hole, give me the paper you have just written.'

‘I shall have to leave the regiment.’

‘You will have to do nothing of the kind.’

‘Sure?’

‘Most certainly you will not.’

‘Then here’s the paper.’

Balehouse pushed the promise across the table. Jervais took a sheet of paper, and wrote on it:

‘Lord Balehouse wants two thousand pounds. Captain Jervais will be much obliged if Mr. Andrew Pollock will lend them to his lordship.’

‘That will be enough. I’ll write the address on the cover. The place is in Lombard-street. Get leave for the day after to-morrow, and run up to town; you can be back with the money in time for mess. Look here, you mustn’t tell this to any of the other men. I don’t think any other fellow

is now hard up, but no one can tell what may happen.'

'No; but do you think Pollock will do this?'

'Without a word.'

CHAPTER II.

AN INVITATION ACCEPTED.

ALTHOUGH the ladies of Berkham Castle went little into society, and spent most of their days within the grounds surrounding the castle, they were not completely isolated. Now and then they drove to the house of some friend ; had luncheon, dined, and drove home again. Now and then the old gate, over which still hung the portcullis of less peaceful days, would open to admit the carriage of some neighbour come to spend the afternoon and evening at the castle. But no one was asked to stay for more than a day, and the Countess and her daughter were never absent from Berkham for a longer time.

The Countess laboured under all the disadvantages of a deserted wife. She had not the freedom of a widow or spinster. Practically her husband did not concern himself in the least what she might do, so long as she did not come near him, or pledge his credit, or ask for more money than he allowed her. Theoretically she was supposed to do nothing of which she had not the Earl's approval. Theoretically, he had not deserted her, for he wrote to her at long intervals, sent her money irregularly, and visited the castle once a year, and carped at her the whole time he was there. According to the law of England, no more is to be expected of a good husband. From the very outset of his bad treatment, Lady Berkham had made up her mind that, for the children's sake, she would spare no pain, refuse no self-denial, rather than give her

lord and master cause of complaint against her.

Now of all the guests who came to Berkham Castle, there was none who liked more to come, and who was better welcomed, than John Southwood and his sister Alice, of Southwood Hall.

John Southwood was a young man of medium height, strong, well-cut features, black hair, beard, and moustaches. His shoulders were slightly rounded, broad, and powerful, and he had neat, clean-made, strong limbs. He had a calm grave carriage, and a deliberate manner of speech. He was five-and-twenty years of age. His sister and himself had been playmates of the young people of the castle as long as either side could remember. John Southwood was now owner of the Southwood estate, and of Southwood Hall, the father having died before the son came of age.

The Countess of Berkham had always taken a deep interest in the Southwood children ; first, because she had admired them for themselves, and secondly, because they had been left motherless when young.

Alice Southwood was now about eighteen, and, like her brother, dark of hair and complexion. She was extremely handsome, and, while her face and eyes made one think of the vivid south, of moonlit Venice and legends of the Alhambra, her manner was quiet and subdued, as befitted our more composed sisters in the north. She liked to come to the Castle because she was deeply attached to the kindly Countess and her daughter.

And the reason why John Southwood liked to come to the Castle on the Cliff, and why Lady Lenore liked to see the Southwoods at the Castle, was because he and she were in love with one another.

They had been companions from childhood, and had always been excellent friends. In a way they had been lovers. When the lady was in frocks he had assumed the duties of private bodyguard, guide, aide-de-camp, and purveyor. When they were walking in the fields or along roads he would allow no mongrel dog, or loutish boy, or turkey-cock, or other peril of the way to approach her dainty ladyship. He would show her paths he had newly discovered in the thickets, and hand her over the stream as though as much depended on her crossing as of Cæsar's at the Rubicon. He would run at the top of his speed of messages for her, and call out, in his loudest voice, her questions to Oliver or the governess when either was beyond the hail of her voice. He would make breakneck ascents up cliff or tree or ruin ; he would risk his limbs or

a ducking by leaning over rock or river to get flowers or fruit for her. And when any of these mighty deeds had been performed he stood by her side flushed with conquest, he would make nothing of his labours, but bow and deprecate their results.

But he had to go away to school; and when he came back for the first summer holidays, he, being then of the ripe age of fifteen, all at once displayed an arrogant scorn of the weaker sex, and would no more consent to spend the days of his manhood in philandering with girls than let any butcher's boy standing two inches taller insult him with impunity.

Years passed. Young Southwood went abroad. For four or five years he hardly saw Lady Lenore, and then he came back to live at home permanently. One of the first visits he paid was with his sister to

Berkham Castle, where he found the good genial Countess stouter than when he had seen her last, and a tall, slender, fair, stately girl by her side. The Countess shook hands with him cordially, and smiled. After this he looked at the girl.

‘You don’t know Nora?’ cried the Countess, laughing. ‘Has she grown out of your memory?’

‘Nora!’ cried Southwood, in astonishment. ‘It can’t be Nora!’

‘It is,’ said the girl, holding out her hand.

He took the hand and let it go again. He could think of nothing to say; his surprise mastered him. He could not so much think as wonder—so much wonder as look at her in blank surprise.

Later in the day, when he and she were alone together, he said,

‘ Before I went away you did not braid your hair as you do now, Nora, and I suppose that makes a great difference.’

‘ O yes, it does.’

‘ And, you know, you wore frocks, and wern’t so tall; and that would make another difference, wouldn’t it? You are not angry with me for not remembering my old—playmate?’

‘ I am not, of course, angry ; it is natural you should not recognise me. You know, when you went away, I was only a child ; and now—’

‘ And now what are you, Nora?’

‘ A woman.’

‘ By Jove you are, a lovely woman too!’

She looked down, and blushed. These were the first admiring words of man that had met her ears.

‘ And now, Nora, that you are a woman,

I suppose I shall have to forget we were ever children together.'

'Why should you?'

'Well, I suppose you will expect me to be more respectful, and call you Lady Lenore?'

'I—I don't think so.'

'And I suppose I must make up my mind to hear myself called Mr. Southwood.'

'I think when any one is by we do not know very well, you must put up with my being respectful.'

'And be called Mr. Southwood?'

'Yes.'

'But when we are alone you will call me Jack?'

'I will.'

'Then, Nora, I hope no other visitors will be at this place when I am here; and

I'll take care no one is at our place when you and your mother come down.'

And so it was that these two people fell to loving one another before either knew anything had begun, and went on loving one another without knowing it until each was long past cure.

There is no sweeter place in all England for lovers than the grounds of Berkham Castle. From the sides of the walls the land falls abruptly, and along this slope are winding paths, shaded by acacias and limes and ashes. Here are sudden breaks in the foliage, opening on the stately gardens of the castle below, and beyond the gardens, rolling plain and thicket and dell, with tracts of ancient woods upon the distant upland.

The Countess had not been blind to what was going on. She saw with pleasure

the intimacy of youth revived, and latter intimacy ripen into love. Personally she liked young Southwood ; his family was old, and his estate, although not large, in perfect condition, and not encumbered. The last of these facts spoke volumes in favour of the young man's prudence and steadiness.

She had taken care her husband should not be kept in ignorance of the course matters had entered upon. One of the duties imposed on her by her lord and master was, that every month she should write him a long letter, telling all the business news of the castle, and such matters generally as related to the place, but did not come under the steward's hand. She performed this duty willingly ; for while it placed no great burden on her, it almost insured no more than one visit from him in the year.

Often he did not read those letters, and

he always answered them in the most peremptory form of order, as, do this, don't do that. From the earliest moment she suspected any feeling stronger than friendship had sprung up between her daughter and Southwood, she had added in a prominent way, from time to time, warnings rising in significance from 'Mr. Southwood and his sister have been with us much of late,' to 'Mr. Southwood has been very attentive to Lenore,' down to the last and most important of all, 'I think you may be prepared to hear soon something from Mr. Southwood about Lenore.'

That last letter had gone a fortnight, and yet of none of these had the Earl taken the slightest notice. When last the Countess heard of him he had been in London, and when there, it was the rule to address letters for him to the Goodwood Club, Pal

Mall. He almost always wrote, giving a new address when he left an old one. No such change of address had been forwarded, and to the Goodwood had the Countess directed all the letters bearing on the Southwood affair. From the fact that the Earl had not given a new address, or replied in any way to four letters, she assumed he must have got them all; that it was more than probable he had read one or two; that he knew what was going on, and would receive anything young Southwood might have to say.

As a matter of fact, the Earl of Berkham had received and read those letters. He had thrown the last of them into the fire, with the comment,

‘It will be time enough to answer the young fool when he does speak to me.’

His head was full of splendid vague

ideas. He did not want to make up his mind until these ideas had taken more definite shape.

He had lately met a man who could, if he wished, clear every penny of debt off Berkham. He had a notion this man would do it at a price. He guessed what the price was. He had a clear notion he would willingly pay that price. He had made up his mind within the last few hours that he would ask this man down to Berkham Castle and see how matters would then turn out.

He had written a cordial note to that man, asking him down to Berkham for a week. That man had effusively accepted the invitation, and the proudest moment in all that man's life was when he announced to his manager he was going to 'take a little holiday, just run down to Berkham Castle with the Earl for a week or so.'

As he made this startling announcement, two cards were handed to him. He glanced casually at them, started, smiled, and said quietly,

‘Show Lord Balehouse in immediately.’

A tall, broad-shouldered, candid-looking, somewhat clumsy young man entered the room.

‘Be seated, my lord,’ said the great speculator, rising. Nodding to the manager, he said, ‘You may retire.’

The young man was exceedingly awkward and nervous, but at last managed to extract a letter from a pocket he had previously explored several times.

‘You—you know Jervais?’ asked the young man, as he handed the note.

‘Perfectly.’ The speculator read the few lines. Looking up, with a most cordial smile, he asked, ‘How will your lordship have it?—cheque or cash?’

‘Cheque,’ answered the young man, with a deep sigh of relief.

The speculator drew the cheque, signed it, and handed it to Lord Balehouse, with a smile, saying, ‘I am delighted to be of such a slight service to you, Lord Balehouse. May I hope to meet you at Berkham Castle next week?’

‘Eh!’ ejaculated the young man.

By way of reply, Mr. Andrew Pollock, the great millionaire, handed Lord Balehouse the letter he had just got from the young man’s father.

CHAPTER III.

THE PALACE OF ART.

WITH an amused smile the speculator sat regarding the young nobleman. Before the latter had time to find words to express his astonishment and concern, Mr. Andrew Pollock said blandly,

‘Is there anything very distressing in what I have told you? Do you know of any reason for feeling uneasy because I am going down to Berkham?’

‘O, certainly not, Mr. Pollock. The only thing is that I did not, when I came in here, know you had met my father.’

‘Nor did I,’ said the speculator suavely, ‘think this morning I should have had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of the Earl of Berkham’s son.’

‘But, Mr. Pollock, I assure you, if I had any idea you—you and my father were intimate, I should not have thought of troubling you to-day.’

‘My dear Lord Balehouse, you have not, let me assure you, troubled me in the least. I am, out of regard to your father, and, if you will allow me to say so, out of regard to yourself also, delighted to be of the least service. The trifle I have done is absolutely nothing. I shall be glad to be of substantial service to you any time I can. I shall always deem it a favour if you will let me know how I can serve you. And now let us drop this wretched paltry business affair, and talk of something pleasanter. Is there any likelihood of my meeting you at Berkham?’

‘Not in the least if my father is there. He and I don’t get on well.’

‘I regret to hear that.’

‘And that is one of the reasons why I am so sorry I bothered you about the money. If you would not be offended, I should much prefer you would take it back.’

The young man held the cheque timidly towards the great financier.

‘My dear Lord Balehouse,’ cried Pollock enthusiastically, ‘how can you say such a thing? I am only too glad to have it in my power to oblige my old friend Jervais and you. I beg of you to put that thing in your pocket, and drop the subject.’

‘But I would much rather that you took this back than that the Earl heard anything about it.’

‘Lord Balehouse, I hope you don’t think because I happen to have an office in the City that I must be a dishonourable man?’

‘O, dear, no, Mr. Pollock; nothing was

farther from my thoughts. I should be exceedingly sorry to think anything of the kind. But I know I ought not to borrow money, and it occurred to me that, as you are such a friend of my father's, it might slip from you in the course of conversation that I had had money of you.'

Mr. Pollock rose, and, going to the young man, who had risen also, put his hand upon his shoulder, and said,

'You must have odd notions of us financiers, Lord Balehouse, if you think we cannot keep a secret. Why, those of us who have the good luck to be married—and I am sorry to say I am not one of that lot—must, and do, have secrets from our wives; secrets worth twenty, thirty, a hundred thousand pounds. The faculty of judiciously holding one's tongue is one of the highest a financier can possess. One may be as flippant as

one likes about general things, but about business, mum's the word. But now I hope you will, my dear Lord Balehouse, believe my word, when I tell you, that neither of this nor of any other such matter as may pass between us, shall your father, the Earl, ever hear a word from my lips. Are you content on this point now ?'

'O, yes, I am quite content now, and very much obliged to you.'

'All right. Now I am just going to have my lunch. Come with me, and we'll have a chat as we eat. I have something in my mind I want to say to you. I am sure I need hardly tell you what I have to say is of a friendly nature, and isn't advice. Come along.'

Lord Balehouse hesitated for a moment, first, because his knowledge of Mr. Pollock was so slight, and next he had a fear this

man might in one way or another lead him into something compromising—he did not know what.

‘I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Pollock,’ he said; ‘but I have to go back to Canonbury almost immediately.’

‘But you haven’t had any lunch, and you can’t go back without some, and you may as well have it with me as all by yourself. Come along.’

The young man found it very hard to refuse. He had in his pocket a cheque for two thousand pounds, which this man had lent him without a ‘shadow of security. Surely he might be civil to this man, and eat and drink with him. He had no clear idea of how Pollock could draw him into anything questionable. He knew that needy men had become chairmen and directors of companies, but he had never heard

that they had been kidnapped first and hocussed afterwards. It would seem ingratitude to refuse. He made his mind up to go. Mr. Pollock led the way into the street, called a hansom, and told the man to drive to the Gog and Magog Club, Albemarle-street.

Mr. Andrew Pollock, financier and speculator, was one of the most remarkable men in England. He had begun life as a boy in a city office. He had watered and swept the floor until he was sixteen years of age, when he was promoted to a stool. At twenty-three he became chief financial clerk, at twenty-five he opened an office of his own, and at thirty was a member of the Stock Exchange; and from that moment his career had been one of the most brilliant and successful ever run in the City of London.

He was now forty-two years of age, and the most important figure in the English commercial world. His wealth was incalculable, his credit limitless. There was scarcely a branch of speculation into which he had not at one time thrown himself, and from which he had not come forth laden with spoil. He said to others he had bought and sold everything but slaves.

He had built a palace for himself in Brompton. He had purchased four blocks of houses, knocked down all the houses, built his palace in the middle, and converted the remaining space into gardens and lakes. In these gardens were grottoes and temples, and statues and cascades, and caves, and archery ground, and cricket ground, and lawn-tennis ground, arcades, sylvan bowers, a wilderness and a maze. There were boats on the water, and fish of every kind that

will swim in fresh water in the lakes and straits. Full-grown trees had been transplanted to this place by the thousand. Sixty thousand loads of rubbish and mould had been employed in making the hills and furnishing soil.

The grounds were surrounded by a wall fifteen feet high, but not a foot of that wall was visible from even the highest room of the house, for a mound sloping inward had been constructed all round the wall, and this mound was covered with green sods, and crowned with shrubs and trees. Statues had been brought from Roman and Florentine studios, quartz from Wales, a weather-stained *chalet* from Switzerland. The stalactites in the roof of the water-cave which served as a boat-house had been formed in a cavern on the west coast of Ireland, to the booming of the Atlantic surge.

For two years an army of men had been employed on those grounds; now these grounds were the wonder of not only London, but of all the strangers who visited our shores and saw them. Of course there were many gardens ten times larger, but when it is remembered that where they lay, a few years ago stood six hundred and forty houses, accommodating three thousand five hundred people, and that not a blade of grass or shrub prospered on that soil, then visitors did wonder and could hardly believe their senses. The price of the site would have been enough to serve as the foundation for two noble families, and the interest of the money spent in converting the brick and mortar to the present condition would keep four earls in splendour.

The house was a plain, square-cut stone building; it was flat, and reminded one of

the water-face of a Venetian palace. To add to this effect, the waters of the lake came up to the rear of the house, and there was a water-gate through which the boats could pass into the water-hall—a tiled chamber forty feet long by twenty-five wide, and lofty in proportion. The house consisted of four stories, and contained two hundred rooms. In counting the rooms it may have been that the cellars and pantries were included, but there were two hundred rooms of one kind or another. The four drawing-rooms were the finest of any private house in London. People said they were as fine as the reception-rooms at the Foreign Office. There was space for a hundred guests in the dining-room, and three hundred could sit down in the banqueting-hall.

The morning-rooms, the dining-rooms,

and the drawing-rooms were on the ground-floor. On the floor above were the billiard-room, card-rooms, smoking-room, library, in which one read, study, in which one wrote, a small gymnasium, and the four best bedroom suites consisting each of bedroom, dressing-room, servant's-room, and bath-room.

The second floor consisted of ordinary bed-rooms, to each of which was attached a bath-room and small sleeping closet for a servant. The third and highest floor contained the kitchens, and the rooms for the servants of the household.

The house was built around a square, and half-way between the first and second floor a roof of glass touched the interior walls, and rising gently was gathered into a dome at the centre. Thus the interior square formed a vast conservatory. Round

the walls of this square, and on a level with the first floor rooms, ran a wide iron balcony paved with red tiles. Into this balcony doors opened from all the rooms on the inner side of the floor. From the balcony four flights of steps descended to the ground floor. By this means one could ascend or descend by these stairways, as well as by the ordinary ones in the house.

The stables were not visible from the house. They were not in the grounds, but lay at the outside of the circumvallating mound, and were reached from the house through a short tunnel, winding through the mound. Here was accommodation for fifty horses, and apartments for the coachmen, ostlers, and helpers. The coach-house was a long, flat building of iron and glass, and large enough to take in a couple of dozen vehicles.

The house was furnished in the most sumptuous manner. There was nothing pretentious or affected in the decorations. All was simple, substantial, and comfortable. The architect, the decorator, and the upholsterer had worked together, and with the aid of unlimited money had produced the most splendid private residence in London.

When the Earl of Berkham had been brought over it first by Mr. Andrew Pollock he had been fairly amazed.

‘Why, Pollock,’ said the Earl, ‘we used to think the Duke of Middlesex had the finest house in London, but his place would turn round in this, and as for the grounds you couldn’t drill a squad in his place, but here you could fight a pitched battle.’

‘I am glad you like it,’ said Mr. Pollock. ‘I admit I have done my humble

best to make the place fit for such of my friends as may honour me with a visit. I have, I own, done my humble best.'

'Humble best be damned!' cried the Earl hotly; 'why you have the finest home in London.'

'It is not perfect yet.'

'Not perfect! then, by Jove, I cannot see what it lacks.'

'A mistress.'

'Ah, true, you are not married, I forgot that. Well, of course, you would never have thought of building such a house, unless you had made up your mind to marry. She must consider herself a lucky woman. Do you think of marrying soon?'

'You see I have had no place to take a wife to until now. I have been so busy all my life, I have never had time to fall in love.'

‘And, may I ask,’ said the Earl carelessly, ‘when you are to be married?’

‘That is always left with the lady.’

‘And what time has the lady fixed?’

‘The lady has not as yet fixed the time, for there is no lady fixed as yet.’

‘O, I see, I see. This place must have cost you a fabulous sum.’

‘You can’t expect to have things good unless you pay for them.’

‘It must have cost you—millions?’ said the Earl.

The financier simply smiled and said, ‘I had the money by me, and I thought I might as well build a house.’

‘You are a wonderful man, Pollock, a very wonderful man. I hope you are in no hurry about that ten thousand of mine?’

‘My dear Lord Berkham, it was you mentioned money, not I. I beg of you not

to allude to the matter. You will observe I have no picture-gallery. A man cannot buy pictures for a gallery all at once.'

'What are those? Where did you get those portraits?'

They were now in the grand corridor at the back of the house.

'O, I bought a dozen portraits for a song, they are all valueless but this one. I'm a business man, and not much given to poetry, but I call this portrait, "The Lady of the House." I think I should desire no more, if this place had a mistress such as that.'

'And do you know whose portrait that is, eh?' said the Earl, pointing with a trembling finger at the canvas in front of which they stood.

'I am sure I haven't the least idea,' answered Pollock.

‘That’s a portrait of my grandmother when a girl, a replica of one by Gainsborough, which you will see when you come down to Berkham some day. They say Lady Lenore, my daughter, is exceeding like the portrait.’

‘Ah! indeed. How singular!’ said Mr. Pollock. He thought to himself, ‘If that is so, I am likely to be much more interested in the great-granddaughter of the lady than in the original Gainsborough.’

CHAPTER IV.

LUNCHEON AT THE GOG AND MAGOG.

THE Gog and Magog was not an aristocratic club. It had not a single lord on its books, although no less than seven baronets, and twenty-two knights were members of it. It was a club of rich City men.

There were very few young men in it, the vast majority of its members being more than thirty-five years of age.

The entrance fee was forty guineas, the yearly subscription thirty. Although it did not appear upon the rules of the club, it was an understood thing that any member becoming bankrupt should resign.

Not more than six hundred men belonged to the Gog and Magog. The mem-

bers were not limited to six hundred; but, as in the case of the bankruptcy, there existed an understanding.

In the City it was considered a very high distinction to belong to the Gog and Magog. No one against whose financial name there was a questionable mark had any chance of getting in. One black ball in four excluded.

In the smoking-room of that club many of the most gigantic commercial undertakings of the age were suggested, discussed, and set going.

Here the floating of companies and loans was arranged with as much ease as the purchase of a box of cigars.

Here transactions involving fifty or a hundred thousand pounds, mentioned incidentally, became matters of stamped agreement next day.

The club was not, of course, intended for business purposes; nor was one hundredth part of the conversation which took place within its walls in any way connected with the business of the speakers. But often men met here to discuss more at leisure than they could in the City, the operations contemplated by them.

Although among the names on the roll of the Gog and Magog might be found those of seven baronets and twenty-two knights, Mr. Andrew Pollock was its most considerable member.

He was the richest, the most enterprising, devoid of conceit or vanity; the last is not a thing usually found in men who have been the builders of their own fortunes.

Sir Frederick Hamley, Bart., was, of course, a great man. He had a bank, and his people had been well known in Lom-

bard-street for upwards of a century. But a City baronet socially is no more to be compared to a county baronet than a City sparrow to the golden eagle.

Of course a City knight is socially indistinguishable from a plain Mr.; but Mr. Andrew Pollock was so much more rich than any baronet belonging to the club that his wealth destroyed the effect of the title, and he was king of the Gog and Magog.

In appearance Mr. Pollock was short and stout, with a dull complexion, large forehead, and steadfast eyes. Although his body was active and his gesture free, his eyes never partook of animation. They rarely moved at all; they were fixed and fishy; they were more the eyes of the dead than the living. It was unpleasant to look at them, unpleasant to remember them

afterwards when one was no longer in his presence.

With those eyes a man could not be popular. He never seemed to be looking at anything, and yet nothing escaped him. When walking he always kept his head thrown back, and his eyes fixed straight in front.

Apart from the eyes, the face of Mr. Andrew Pollock was not uncomely, and when he smiled, all but the eyes was genial and pleasant.

But no one could overcome the depression caused by those dead fishy eyes; and although Pollock was an active and energetic man, and although you were impressed with his activity and energy when in his presence, no sooner were you out of sight of him than you lost all memory of his activity and energy, you became depressed

by a sense of weight and obstruction, as though you were pushing against a rock which stopped the way, and, even though you knew your efforts were futile, could not desist.

When the hansom drew up at the door of the Gog and Magog, Mr. Pollock jumped out, paid the driver, and led the way up the steps.

Neither the inside nor outside of the club was imposing. Noiseless comfort was the great thing aimed at, and noiseless comfort had been attained. On the street face of the house sound was excluded by double windows.

Great attention had been paid to the ventilation, and the air for that purpose was drawn through pipes opening on the rear of the house, thus these pipes were free from the rumble of traffic.

The rooms and stairs were covered with thick carpets of greenish hue. The halls and passages were laid down in soft matting. There was no oilcloth or linoleum; the foot fell on nothing hard.

The waiters spoke in low voices as if in a church. For a waiter to rattle knives, forks, glasses, plates, cups, saucers, spoons, anything, was to incur censure; to break anything in one of the members' rooms was to merit dismissal.

Pollock led the way into the dining-room. As he crossed the floor he nodded to a few men sitting at various tables. He himself selected a table in a corner.

'I prefer this table to any other in the room,' said Pollock, as the waiter drew out a chair for the visitor. 'In the first place, it is in a corner; in the second place, it is furthest from a door; and in the third, it enjoys a good light.'

‘Yes,’ said Lord Balehouse, ‘it is awkward to eat when a lot of people are staring at your back.’

‘And if I see the steam of my soup blown by a draught I cannot enjoy it.’

‘Ay, the steam of soup is always enough for me. I never eat any. I scalded myself once when a child with soup, and never ate any since,’ said Lord Balehouse.

‘And unless I can plainly see what is on my plate I do not relish my food,’ said the financier.

‘Of course not,’ said Lord Balehouse, at the same time wondering how a man could see anything plainly out of such fishy eyes.

‘If you will venture on the cod I think you will like it. They *can* cook cod here. Taste that brown sherry. I know it oughtn’t to be brown; but what can you do? The

pale sherry here is ordinary, but this brown sherry is a peculiar feature of the club. I don't suppose you ever tasted any of it before. There are only two lots like it in England: one here, and one at my place, St. Austin's Towers, in Brompton. You have never seen my place.'

'No; never.'

'Then you shall come often to see me, now that we are acquainted.'

'It's all very well,' thought Lord Balehouse, 'for him to say I shall go to see him often. But although he has lent me two thousand pounds I'll be hanged if I think he and I are going to be friends. There's something funny in all this—I wonder are there any Jews here.'

'You'll find that a light dry wine. I like a light wine for lunch. Don't pass the saddle, my lord, they will not give you any-

thing else except a piece of stilton. One soup, one fish, one joint and cheese is all they give you here for luncheon. If your lordship had time to wait for dinner they would treat you better. Of course, if you could wait for dinner I should take you home with me to St. Austin's Towers. I hope you will like my place when you see it. Your father has often been over it, and he likes it very much. By the way, he found out a most peculiar thing the first time I had the honour of showing the Earl over it. You must know when I began to get on in the world I was one day waited upon by a picture-dealer, who lives somewhere near Charlotte-street, Fitzroy-square. He offered to get a set of my ancestors painted for me back to Henry VIII., with proper costumes, and the proper mark of age, at fifty pounds a portrait. I said I did not want a set of

ancestors painted, but that if he had any good pictures for sale I'd be glad to go and look at them.

"I think," said the picture-dealer, "I have exactly what would suit you. I bought a ready-made set of ancestors the other day, and I could let you have them at twenty-five pounds each."

'I went and saw them, and bought them, just to put in a black corner. When your father saw them he recognised that one of them was a copy of a portrait of your great-grandmother by Gainsborough.'

'I know the picture,' said Lord Balehouse.

'Your father says the portrait is very like the Lady Lenore Granley.'

'Yes, so they say.'

'Why, do not you agree with them?'

'O, yes, the likeness is very strong.'

‘Now, Lord Balehouse, I don’t want you to think that there is a fragment of poetry in my nature. There is not. But before I had had the honour of showing the Earl over my place, I had always called the copy the Lady of St. Austin’s Towers.’

‘That is strange,’ said Lord Balehouse, although he did not see anything strange in the circumstance.

‘And now,’ continued Mr. Pollock, as he dabbled his fingers in the finger-bowl—they had never given up finger-bowls at the Gog and Magog—‘I am going to spend a few days at Berkham Castle, and I hope to be able to induce the Earl to take a loan of St. Austin’s Towers for next season, so that my foolish notion may, for a few days any way, be realised.’

‘The Countess and Lady Lenore never

come to London,' said Lord Balehouse, with sudden reserve.

'But the Earl of Berkham and Lord Balehouse will try to persuade them.'

Balehouse shook his head, and did not reply.

'I must catch the 4.15 P.M. for Canonbury,' said he, instead of an answer.

'I'll drive you to the station.'

'O, I could not think of putting you to such an inconvenience.'

And the young Lord rose and left alone.

CHAPTER V.

MR. POLLOCK AT BERKHAM.

FOR years no guest had been invited to the Castle on the Cliff by the Earl, and both the Countess and Lady Lenore were lost in wonder as to whom or what this guest could be. Lord Berkham had been very brief in his note. He had said—

‘A friend of mine is going down with me, and will stay for a few days.’

‘It must be a stranger,’ said Lady Lenore, ‘otherwise papa would mention his name.’

‘Your papa, my dear, is so peculiar, that if this visitor was one of our oldest friends, your father might not mention his name to us.’

‘That is true,’ said Lady Lenore. And there the conversation ended for the time.

At last the day came, and brought the men—the Earl of Berkham and Mr. Andrew Pollock.

To the astonishment of the Countess and her daughter, the Lord of Berkham was almost polite to his wife and child.

The Earl had condescended to take the ladies into his consideration, and had expressed a hope, in which he included them, that they would all be friends. This was, indeed, a condescension of the very highest from him.

Lady Berkham smiled, and gave her hand to Mr. Pollock.

Mr. Pollock had never shaken hands with a Countess before, and when the feat had been accomplished, he felt amazed that he experienced no unwonted sensation. He

knew it was a very gracious act on the part of her ladyship to offer him her hand, and he, from that moment, conceived a warm feeling of gratitude to her.

Lady Lenore merely bowed.

Mr. Pollock thought Lady Lenore surprisingly like the portrait. He was convinced now that St. Austin's Towers never could hope to have a more fitting mistress than Lady Lenore Pollock. Pollock was not a name that sounded as well as Granley, but then Pollock looked much better at the end of a cheque. After a while Lady Lenore Pollock would sound as well, and indeed, when the mistress of St. Austin's Towers was the daughter of an Earl, her name must sound well in the ears of the fashionable world. As a matter of fact, Pollock did not care for fashion, but he did for position and power. He wanted to go into

Parliament, but not until he had some assured social position. When he became a member he meant to be active.

The Earl of Berkham was a Conservative, and so was he. With his vast wealth, a seat in Parliament, the finest house in London, and a beautiful wife, who was the daughter of an earl, a baronetcy was certain to come his way, and if a City man made a vast fortune, married an earl's daughter, and was created a baronet, it was as much as could be expected. Supposing he succeeded, his eldest son would be the grandson of an Earl and a Baronet, and if his son possessed talent and ambition, and was not in a business, a peerage would not be too high an object for him to aim at.

‘What a beautiful place you have here,’ said the financier to the Earl, as the two

walked down the sloping ground towards the gardens.

‘Ay, ay,’ said the Earl. ‘The place is all right. One could improve it if one had money, but Pollock, I haven’t, as you know, the price of a leg of mutton. The property has been upwards of four hundred years in our family one way or another.’

‘Yes; but money is not very hard to get. There are ways of getting money.’

‘Egad, I’ve tried every way I can. Balehouse has positively declined doing anything with me. The fact is, he and I don’t get on well together. I am sorry to say it—I, his father, am sorry to say that Balehouse is an impudent puppy.’

‘Come, come my lord, that is very strong language for a father to use of a son,’ said Pollock soothingly.

‘It is, sir, no stronger than he deserves.

I call him an impudent puppy, sir, and I have cause for it. This is considered to be the best place to see the gardens from. These gardens are not properly kept. I can't afford to have men enough for them.'

'They are lovely, my lord.'

'But, sir, as I was saying, Balehouse is a puppy. Two years ago, when he came of age, I asked him to join me in raising a few thousands; and he not only refused me point blank, but offered me his advice as well. Offered me his advice! Did you ever hear anything like that before?'

'Young men are seldom prudent,' said Pollock. 'I wonder what the Earl would say if he heard of the two thousand?' he thought.

'Prudence, prudence! I call it—impertinence, insolence! He knew I wanted

money; and he not only refused to join me in raising it, but absolutely talked to me about retrenchment, and—and—and my own personal affairs.'

'Of course, you were unable to raise money in the ordinary way?'

'Yes, of course I was. They won't lend me another sixpence on the estate.'

'No. I daresay the regular money-lenders would not care to run in any deeper; but then, your lordship knows a friend might do what a man from a purely business point of view would decline.'

'Of course, Pollock, of course, And, as a matter of fact, you did come in and lend me money on no security, beyond my signature. I feel very much obliged to you; but then, you see, if my son had behaved properly, I need be under no obligation to you.'

‘I assure your lordship you are under no obligation to me ; and I beg of you to put such a notion out of your head. I have been very fortunate in my time ; I have made a fortune, and a few thousands are of no earthly moment to me. I am sorry, for your own sake and for the sake of their ladyships, that you have found such a difficulty in getting money. Is there, do you think, no way in which you could get what you want?’

‘No way, as far as I can see. I’ve tried every one and everywhere. I have drawn the line at giving a bill of sale on the furniture which is my own.’

‘I should be horrified to think you did anything of the kind.’

‘And yet, what am I to do? How, for instance, am I to pay you back? I don’t suppose all the furniture I own would

fetch two thousand. What good is two thousand?’

‘My Lord Berkham, I promise you one thing, namely, that you will be able to pay me when I ask you for the money.’

‘My dear Pollock, I know you are the prince of good fellows; and I should feel quite content if my other creditors were like you. But they aren’t. I shall soon be at the end of what you lent me; and then what am I to do?’

‘Surely some way suggests itself to you.’

‘I no more see my way out of it than I see my way to jump over this vinery. By the way, those are some of the finest vines in England. But the whole place is in ruins. It would take a couple of thousand pounds to put those gardens alone into order.’

‘Yes, one might spend a little money

here; where Nature has done so much it is a pity not to help her. Working here would not be like working where brick and mortar had reigned, and where a horizon line is made of a wall, concealed by a grass mound and a row of evergreens.'

'Ay, ay, I admit you had enormous difficulties to overcome; but all your difficulties, in laying-out and building, were nothing compared with those of a tenant for life, trying to raise money on a property already over mortgaged.'

'May I speak freely to your lordship?'

'Most certainly, my dear Pollock; I shall be only too glad if, after talking, you can show me any way out of my difficulties.'

'You have a son?'

'Who, as I told you before, will not lift his hand to save his father.'

'He may marry.'

‘How will that improve my position?’

‘He may marry money.’

‘And do you suppose if he married a million he’d give a penny to save his father’s body and soul? O no! Talk of something else. Oliver was not brought up by his mother to do such a thing as that for me.’

‘Let us suppose he would not—though I don’t know that it is fair to suppose it. Let us suppose he was about to marry a great heiress. It might be arranged that the mortgages should be paid off, and Lord Balehouse take up the property.’

‘And leave me on the parish?’ said the Earl, with a bitter smile.

‘And make you a fair allowance,’ said the financier coolly.

The Earl, trembling with passion, seized Pollock, and pointing to one of the towers

that stood on the precipitous edge of the cliff, said hoarsely,

‘I would go up to the top of that tower first and throw myself down, before I would submit to such an arrangement. While I live I shall be master, mark my words.’

‘Very well,’ said Pollock quietly. ‘I am not surprised to hear you say so. You have given me permission to speak, and I will speak plainly. You have a daughter, the Lady Lenore?’

‘Yes,’ said the Earl.

‘She may marry a rich husband. She may marry a man who would not only be able to keep her in a fitting manner, but may also be willing and able to relieve the property of not only a part, but of all its encumbrances.’

‘Ah! where is such a man to be found?’

‘I have such a man in my mind.’

‘I can hardly believe you. Tell me of him.’

‘He is not noble, and he is not young. He began life at the foot of the ladder, and has worked his way up into a position of opulence. He has got a little way to the wrong side of forty—not much—a couple of years. I know he would be prepared to make a very handsome settlement. He has not yet gone into public life; but he means to throw himself, body and soul, into the Conservative cause. He will enter into Parliament as soon as he can find a seat, and he would have good reason to hope he might in the end receive some acknowledgment of his service from his party. As far as estates go, I do not think he would have the least hesitation in advancing a hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand on a simple note of hand.’

‘Eh!’ exclaimed the Earl, almost startled by this exact picture of his hopes.

‘If your lordship thinks there would be any use in such a suitor addressing himself to you with respect to the hand of Lady Lenore, I should be very glad indeed to tell you who he is. But, of course, my lord, there would be less than nothing to be gained in disclosing his name, if your lordship would not entertain such a candidate.’

‘You are quite right, Pollock, quite right. It is a very serious matter. I’ll think over it. Can I have until to-morrow to think over it?’

‘Most certainly.’

‘Then I will speak to you to-morrow about the matter. Let me show you the wood.’

After this Pollock spoke very guardedly of Lord Balehouse’s allowance, and the delighted Earl promised to improve it.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE WOOD.

WHILE the two men were walking about the garden, discussing the financial position of the owner, two other people had left the Castle, and were walking side by side in the wood, now sober and silent in the October afternoon.

‘And so, Nora, your father has not only paid you a visit, but brought a guest with him. What is this guest like?’

‘He’s a short, stout man, with queer eyes and an awkward manner. Not awkward like Oliver, you know. Oliver is clumsy, but this man is awkward; and he has got the most horrible eyes you ever saw.’

I don't know what made papa bring such a man here. I hope he'll go soon.'

'Let us hope he will, if you don't like him. He is to stay some days with you?'

'O yes; I don't know how long, but some days. I shall make excuses, and see him as little as possible. Why didn't you bring Alice with you to-day?'

'Well, the fact is, Nora, I wanted to be alone. I heard your father was expected; but I did not know anything about the stranger until I came here. I wanted to have a chat with your father.'

She said nothing to this.

They were walking along a winding path, that rose and fell by little glade and miniature hill. This walk was one of the loveliest places in the private grounds of the Castle. Even in summer, when the birds sang their loudest, a sense of silence

filled the wood. Now songs were hushed, the only sound that could be heard was the rustle of a faint breeze in the withered leaves which had already fallen from the dark and ragged trees.

The most picturesque part of the wood was where the path led down the sides of a small valley, and was cut in two by a noisy brawling stream, across which were stepping-stones.

Overhanging this stream was a large flat rock, from which a view could be got of the winding glen and a score of tiny waterfalls. This was a favourite resting-place of the ladies of the Castle, and often in the summer weather they sat here sewing or reading all day long, from luncheon to dinner-time.

When Southwood and Lady Lenore arrived at it he suggested that they should

sit awhile. The day was bright and clear. Beneath them murmured the little stream, around them the leaves fell softly one by one, and were lightly trundled by the wind over the dry short grass.

He took up a handful of pebbles, and began dropping them one by one over the rock into the stream below. She sat at his side, drawing squares and circles on the rock with the ferrule of her parasol.

‘As I was saying, Nora’—he selected a pebble with great care, and dropped it over the ledge—‘I want to have a quiet chat with your father to-day. I know what an odd and unpleasant man your father is, and I want to do everything in such a way that he cannot have any fault to find with us. Do you understand?’

‘I think I do.’

‘You see, Nora, if I were dealing with

any other man alive I should not act in such a stately and middle-aged manner. It is very hard to have to talk to you in this roundabout and mysterious way, about a matter there is no mystery in. If I spoke first, to either the Countess or yourself, on any matter of importance, he would never listen to me. I am resolved to run no risk. Your mother has told me she has written to him, preparing him for what I have to say, and that she thinks there will be no difficulty. I put the question to her. She said the Earl had not replied to any of the letters, but that she was almost sure he must have read them, and he isn't the kind of man to hold his hand if he wanted to write No.'

She said nothing to this. In her heart she felt angry with her father for being the man he was. Jack was no doubt wise in

the course he had taken. But it was hard, when they both knew they were in love with one another, that they must go on with this foolish concealment. And yet, of course, it was much better they should do anything than risk failure, though for her part failure or success was not of much moment. She loved Jack, she would never love any one else, and she would marry him in spite of her father, who had never taken any notice of her, or done anything more for her than for the lodge-keeper's daughter.

John Southwood, as he thoughtfully dropped pebbles into the pool, was very indignant with the Earl. He had made love to Lady Lenore, and she knew he had made love to her, and her mother knew it, and all the people about the place knew it, and the Earl himself knew it, and none so far as he,

Southwood, was aware, had any objection to offer, and Lady Lenore herself had given him reason to believe she would not object to him for a husband; and yet the inordinate crassness of the Earl's nature, and a certain conviction that if the Earl were not first spoken to consent would never be given, had paralysed the young man, and kept from his lips the words burning in his heart.

He spoke again. 'I dare say if I met your father here he would pass me by. It is ever so long since I saw him, and I must be very much changed since then. You don't think he'd know me ?'

'I think he would not.'

'I hope I shall be able to get a quiet half-hour with him some time to-day.' He ceased throwing pebbles into the water, and drew nearer to her. 'And, Nora, if I see

him and am lucky with him, I may come and find you out, and say to you what I have been longing to say for ever so long?"

'Yes, Jack.'

'Ah, Nora, I don't know how I have kept silent so long! It has been very hard on me, very. Often, as I drive or ride over, I have thought of coming back, and—and—and Nora, telling you all, and risking all.'

'What was it you feared to risk?' she asked, in a very low voice.

'The good will of your father.'

'O, I thought it was something about me! If you feared anything about me you might have made your mind easy.'

She had coloured slightly, and had averted her head.

'Do not tempt me, Nora; we have only a few hours to wait. I should never for-

give myself if I gave way at the last moment, now that I have held out so long.'

He was looking straight before him, and not at her. He was very much in love with this tall fair girl. If he thought it would do her more good that he should die than that he should live he would throw himself from that rock.

She was chafing under the feeling that her father was now unconsciously exercising a right over her which he had not earned by anything but the mere fact of his being her father. She knew her father had been a bad husband, and that he had never taken more interest in her or Oliver than if they had been the children of a chance acquaintance. And here was Jack, one of the noblest men alive, absolutely afraid of her father or of what her father might do! Why should her father, who had never

done anything to win her love or obedience, stand now in any attitude of authority between her and John Southwood? Of course it would be better, if possible, that the Earl's consent should be obtained quietly, and that all went off smoothly. But after all—after all—here she ceased thinking, and began to speak:

‘And suppose you meet my father and speak to him, and he says No, what will you do then? Will you go away without seeing me?’

‘But, Nora, he will not say No.’

‘But suppose he does?’

‘Well, I shall come to you all the same.’

‘And will you, will you—what will you do then?’

‘Well, then, I’ll tell you I love you very dearly, and ask you to be my wife.’

Her colour deepened, and she averted

her head still more. He kept his eyes fixed ahead. He was afraid to look at her, lest he should lose control over himself.

‘And what will you say to me, Nora?’

‘I shall say, “I consider, Mr. Southwood, that it is only proper for you to speak to my papa before I answer such a question.” And then you will say, “But I have asked your father, and he refuses me point-blank.” You see, I shall have you at a great disadvantage.’

She smiled, but kept her head averted.

‘Then I shall say, “Nora, will you marry me without the consent of your father?” What will you answer to that?’

She did not reply. She dropped her head, but still kept her face away from him.

For the first time since they had sat down he turned around and looked at her.

He saw the drooped head, the flush on the white neck. He had struggled manfully up to this. He could struggle no longer. He put his arm round her unresisting form, and drew her tenderly towards him, whispering,

‘And what will Nora say when John Southwood asks her will she marry him without her father’s consent—will she, in fact, run away with him if necessary?’

‘Yes.’

He wound both his arms round her and kissed her—kissed her the first time since they had been children together.

At that moment footsteps approached them from behind, and turning hastily round, Southwood saw the Earl and the visitor.

CHAPTER VII.

SUITOR AND FATHER.

SOUTHWOOD got on his feet in some confusion. He assisted Lady Lenore to rise, and then, facing fully round, lifted his hat to the Earl, and bowed.

For a while the Earl stood regarding the lovers with a stare of rage and stupefaction.

Southwood wished to speak, and break the oppressive silence, but he felt it was the right of the Earl to speak first.

Lady Lenore blushed, and turned her head away, but felt no grave uneasiness ; for was not her father prepared for this by her mother's letters ? and as to Jack telling her he loved her before he spoke to her

father, why that was nothing extraordinary, was it? Upon the whole, the strongest feeling in her mind was one of resentment against her father for intruding at that moment. Why had he, who kept so studiously away from home, come back on the very day Jack spoke to her? He had brought this horrid man, with the dead eyes. What was that man doing here? It was plain to her now; her father had come back solely for the purpose of bringing this man down with him. No doubt this man was one of her father's disreputable companions. Why had he brought one of his disreputable companions to their quiet home? Bringing this man here was affronting her mother, herself—and Jack. Then her mind turned away from her father, and fixed itself on Mr. Andrew Pollock; and there and then she resolved to loathe the guest of her father.

Lord Berkham did not recognise the young man at first, but he knew his daughter. Then all at once he remembered his wife's reference to Southwood's aspirations, and he knew the man whom he had accidentally come upon kissing his daughter in a wood! He grew white, and for a moment his tremulousness left him. When he spoke there was even a tone of dignity in his voice.

'Mr. Pollock,' said the Earl, 'will you have the kindness to give your arm to Lady Lenore? We will return to the Castle, if you please.'

Now Mr. Andrew Pollock, notwithstanding his millions and his four fine drawing-rooms at Brompton, was not accustomed to giving his arm to any lady, and certainly never before had he been asked to offer it to the daughter of an earl.

And it was also true he had never before been asked by an earl to give his arm to a lady. He was short of stature, and stout, not to say stumpy, and used his legs clumsily, as every man must who has been brought up in a city. He was, moreover, in great haste to do what the Earl had asked; so that, putting everything together, he seemed ludicrously awkward. She had never met any one like him before; and as she took the arm, which stood out at a sharp angle from his side, she laughed a half-amused half-scornful laugh.

The financier and Lady Lenore moved off, leaving Southwood and the Earl alone. Lord Berkham was not a man of very nice feeling in anything. He was thoroughly selfish. He would not allow man or woman whom he could remove to stand in his path. He was a mean autocrat. He had no pride.

He had not even the graceful weakness of vanity. He was as greedy for money as a miser, without having the excuse a miser has. He was an old man before his time, and now he strove, by lavishness and following evil ways unreflectingly, to cheat nature, and seem to himself, at all events, still young.

Under ordinary circumstances he would not have objected to young Southwood as a suitor for his daughter. But the circumstances were not ordinary. Pollock had lent him ten thousand pounds, and could 'lend' him what would pay off every penny of mortgage on the property. That was a very important consideration, very. If Nora married Southwood she would be satisfactorily settled. But then, no matter how liberal a settlement Southwood might make, he, Lord Berkham, would not be a

penny the better, and he wanted pennies very badly just now. No man of his own social standing would pay off the debts of Berkham, and very few could if they would; but here was this man Pollock able and willing to make a settlement ten times as large as young Southwood, and at the same time pay off the mortgages. And here was the man who dared to stand up before him and oppose his wishes.

‘Mr. Southwood,’ said his lordship; ‘I believe it is to Mr. Southwood I speak.’

‘I am John Southwood,’ said the young man, bowing slightly.

‘Will you do me the honour of giving me a few minutes’ conversation with you?’

‘I am at your lordship’s disposal.’

‘Then, if you please, we will follow Lady Lenore and Mr. Pollock.’

The young man bowed slightly again, and the two moved slowly away.

The Earl was very polite and courtly to Southwood, but the young man did not care for the Earl or his courtliness. Now Nora's father knew, had seen how matters stood, and Nora's father was free to be courtly or grumpy, just as he pleased. For the Earl, John Southwood had a most sincere contempt. He was in love with Nora. Nora's father was a thoroughly bad man, and he, Southwood, was going to marry Nora, who loved him, in spite of all the earls and fathers in England. The Countess approved of him as a son-in-law. He would have had the highest respect for any objections coming from the Countess, but nothing the Earl could say against him would have weight. It is true he had intended to say nothing to Nora until he

had first spoken to her father; but this resolution arose not out of deference to the feelings of the Earl, but out of a desire that there should be no unpleasantness to any one in the affair. The Countess had written the Earl all about it. Berkham knew perfectly well what had been going on; and if he had surprised Nora and him, what of it?

At length, as they walked along, the Earl spoke:

‘Mr. Southwood, I will not conceal from you that I witnessed a scene between you and Lady Lenore which has caused me—to speak very quietly—much surprise.’

By this speech the Earl put Southwood in an awkward position. Naturally, the young man’s reply to it would be, ‘How can you have been surprised, since Lady Berkham has long ago informed you of my attentions to Lady Lenore?’ But then, al-

though in Southwood's mind there was not the shadow of a doubt the Earl knew all about it; what Lady Berkham had told him or Nora was, of course, in the nature of a purely private communication, and could not in any way be used now.

Kicking the withered leaves in silence, Southwood walked on a few seconds.

He said to himself, 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' and then plunged into the middle of things without a prefatory phrase.

'Lord Berkham,' he said, 'I am in love with your daughter. I have reason to believe she is not indifferent to me. I now ask you, may I hope you will consent to our marriage?'

Almost any words would have been preferable to the Earl to these. They were simple and straightforward. It was almost

impossible to quarrel with them, and yet this young man must be quarrelled with. This young man must be sent to the right-about—driven off, bag and baggage. The Earl paused a longer time to reply than Southwood had to propose. At last, he said:

‘I think you should have spoken to me first; and I was most seriously displeased to find my daughter on the verge of a path which many people use, in such a situation as when I came up. She is not a milkmaid or a farmer’s daughter, Mr. Southwood.’

‘In justice to myself, I must say,’ replied the young man, ‘that I never mentioned the subject of my hopes to Lady Lenore until to-day—until a few minutes ago.’

‘It was unfortunate you mentioned them then.’

‘I am exceedingly sorry you think so. I came over here to-day with the sole intention of speaking to you on this matter.’

‘And instead of speaking to me, you go direct to my daughter.’

Now, Southwood could not, if he had felt ever so much love and respect for the Earl, say that he had really and truly not made a direct proposal to Lady Lenore, for if he did, in the first place, it would be a breach of lover’s confidence, and in the second place, how could he explain the fact that when the Earl came up he had his arm round Nora’s waist, and that, for all he knew to the contrary, the father had seen him kiss his daughter?

But then he had a clear conscience in what he did say:

‘I came over here to-day, Lord Berkham, for the express purpose of speaking

to you on the subject, and only for an accident, which I leave to the generosity of your lordship to imagine, I should have spoken to you before saying a word to Lady Lenore.'

Now, although there was nothing like an untruth in this speech of the young man, there was most certainly a want of ingenuousness in it. Southwood, when he appealed to the generosity of the Earl, did not believe there was a particle of any such quality in the disposition of the other. But even a mild casuist might, under similar circumstances of duress, assume there is generosity in every human heart, and so, in fact, there is, although in popular language of many people it may be said he had no such virtue whatever.

'I am,' said the Earl, 'exceedingly sorry for the accident which prevented your

speaking to me before you spoke to my daughter, for then she would have been spared the pain of what I have now to say.'

'And may I ask what it is, your lordship, that you have now to say?'

'Simply that I do not see my way to accepting the offer which you have done me the honour of making me.'

'What!' cried the young man, drawing himself up suddenly. 'May I ask upon what grounds you have come to such a decision?'

'In a case of this kind, I think, Mr. Southwood, you will admit a father has a perfect right to decide without declaring the reasons which go to make up his decision.'

'Right or no right,' said the young man hotly, 'I have no doubt that if you have made up your mind not to give your

consent to our marriage, you will keep to your decision.'

'Mr. Southwood, you are a young man, and are, no doubt, insolent without intending it.'

'I intend nothing more than I say, and nothing less. If there is insolence in what I say, I mean to be insolent. But when I spoke I had no intention of being insolent. I intended merely that I should put in words the thing that was in my mind.'

'In that case, sir, and since you seem to have not the least idea of what is due from a man in your position, as suitor, to a man in my position, as father, I think we had better part.'

'I am sure of it. I shall go this way. Farewell.'

'And to you, sir, farewell.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'WHAT HAS BECOME OF JACK?'

IN the meantime Lady Lenore, leaning on the arm of Mr. Andrew Pollock, walked along the winding woodland path.

It was a good while before Mr. Pollock recovered his mind sufficiently to be able to say anything. He had come down to Berkham with the object, should he see his way to it, of proposing for the Earl's daughter. On the very day of his arrival, within an hour or so of his introduction to Lady Lenore, he had seen a young man with his arm round her.

Now Mr. Pollock was a man of the world in many ways, and he did not, upon seeing a young man's arm round the lady's

waist, form any very disagreeable opinion of the lady herself, in fact, he thought there was nothing at all remarkable in a good-looking young man having his arm round the waist of this very graceful young woman. He had sprung from a class of people who do not attach much importance to civilities of that kind. But he did attach importance to the thought which followed the sight, namely, that perhaps, not only was this young man in love with this young woman, but that possibly this young woman was in love with this young man.

It has been said already that Mr. Andrew Pollock, at one time of his life, when he was first launched upon the world, had sprinkled and swept out the office floor. Although he had prospered greatly in business, and was now the most successful man in London, with no exception, there still clung to him

a few drops from that watering-pot, a few hairs from that brush.

Of course Mr. Pollock had given a few dinners at St. Austin's Towers, but then as he was a bachelor, and had no female relative, or, for the matter of that, no relative whatever, they were naturally bachelor parties.

Excellence, without display, had been the chief features of these festivities. But, alas, there had been no ladies. It is true that for a long time before Mr. Pollock built St. Austin's Towers he had lived in a grand house, had been a rich man, but usually he had been a recluse. What entertainments he had given had always been housed at the Gog and Magog.

To have been introduced to his first countess, and for the first time to find himself alone with an earl's daughter leaning on

his arm, all in one day was too much for Mr. Pollock, and although he could have bought up the Berkham Castle estate over and over again, he found the greatest possible difficulty in saying a word to Lady Lenore.

In the class from which he had sprung such an act as putting an arm round a young woman's waist would have meant nothing, but when a young man put his arm round Lady Lenore Granley's waist, it meant a great deal indeed. In fact, although he had never read a novel in his life he had a dim notion that such a situation was altogether inconsistent with any other than the very clearest understanding between people of that position of life.

If this suspicion of his were true—if he and the Earl had really come on Lady

Lenore and a lover, what then? From every point of view that would be bad. It would be bad that Lady Lenore had a lover. It would be bad that he, having said what he had already that day said to the Earl, was present when Lord Berkham came upon the pair, for it would necessitate a long and unpleasant explanation, and, in the next place, the fact of his having been with her father at the time, would, he felt certain, prejudice her against him.

Upon the whole he was very uncomfortable and sadly lacking of self-possession, and if he could he would at that moment have jumped on a magic carpet and ordered the viewless steeds to waft him to Lombard-street, City. But there was no magic carpet near and Lady Lenore was on his arm, so some attempt must be made at conversation.

‘This is a lovely place you have here, Lady Lenore,’ said he almost timidly.

‘Yes,’ she said carelessly. ‘People admire it now and then, and particularly this wood. Are you fond of scenery?’

‘O, yes,’ said Pollock, greatly flattered at being asked a question. ‘I have done a little in that way myself.’

‘Ah, you paint?’ asked Lady Lenore with vivacious interest.

‘No, I do not paint; but if you will be good enough, as I hope you may, to come to London with the Earl and Countess next season, I shall be very glad to show you what I have done.’

‘I fear there isn’t the least chance. My mother and I never go anywhere. We are like nuns.’

‘In this case we hope to prevail upon you to come up to London. Your noble

father and I intend doing all we can to make the Countess and you and Lord Balehouse come up to London next season, if it was only for a month.'

'Do you know—,' she paused a moment in doubt as to whether she should say 'my brother,' or 'Lord Balehouse.' In the pause she looked at him, and decided there was something wrong with him. He was not like any other man she had met before, but she could not tell in what he differed, but the difference was not in his favour. He wasn't like Hicks, the gardener, and he wasn't like any one whom they had visited or who had visited them. She would have preferred Hicks, the gardener, for he could interest her. She always spoke of Lord Balehouse as 'my brother' to Hicks, but upon that instant she made up her mind that this man was not to be treated as

either Hicks or the ordinary visitors at the castle, she therefore said, 'Do you know Lord Balehouse?'

The question, simple as it was, put Mr. Pollock in no slight difficulty. He did not want to say he was unacquainted with Lord Balehouse, for he intended using his acquaintance with his lordship as one of the ways of propitiating Lady Lenore. He did not, on the other hand, now wish to say he knew Lord Balehouse, lest it might get to the Earl's ears, and a suspicion of the truth come with the news. He parried the question with,

'I have met Lord Balehouse in London. He is stationed in Canonbury, I believe?'

'Yes. It's a horrid slow place, he says; the men have nothing to do, and are driven to play cards all day and bet on horses.'

Her affection for her brother carried

her so far. She took very little interest in what she said. Her thoughts and imagination were with Jack, who had by this time, she felt assured, told her father, and had got the Earl's grumbling consent.

'I have had the honour of knowing the Earl of Berkham for some time, and I will not presume to say to you, Lady Lenore, in what high esteem I hold your father.'

She simply bowed. She repressed a smile, and thought, 'Can this man, this man with those awful dead eyes, be a humourist?'

He had spoken as though he had something of consequence to say. He resumed speaking in the same impressive tone.

'I made the acquaintance of your brother through a gentleman who is a friend of his and a friend of mine, Captain Jervais—'

‘My brother is always speaking in the highest terms of Captain Jervais,’ she said with vivacity and interest.

If this man was introduced by Jervais to her brother, he must not be exactly worthless and contemptible. She had heard so much of Jervais from Oliver that she felt certain Jervais would not introduce her brother to any one who was contemptible.

‘Yes,’ said Pollock, still in the impressive voice of a man who had something to say: ‘I may, I trust, speak to you on a small private matter—a purely family matter—and to which a stranger, such as I am, should not even allude unless he thought, nay, unless he was quite sure he could do something useful.’

‘I am sure if it is for the good of my brother—’

‘It is.’

'Then I shall be delighted to hear anything you may please to say to me, and you may rely upon my secrecy.'

'I am, Lady Lenore, most anxious anything which may pass between you and me should be considered as intended for the ears of the Countess as well as yours.'

'O, I may tell mamma, may I!' she exclaimed aloud; adding mentally, 'why, this man is going to be our friend and not papa's.'

'I most particularly wish you to do so. You know your brother is a nobleman by nature, as well as by birth. He is young, and in good health and spirits. He is heir to a fine estate, and to a title people would rather own than many a dukedom. Well, since I had last the pleasure of seeing Lord Balehouse, I have had an opportunity of speaking with Captain Jervais. To my

surprise—to my amazement I may say—I have learned that Lord Balehouse is allowed a ridiculously small sum yearly to eke out the beggerly pay of a subaltern.'

'Three hundred a year,' she said.

She was beginning to like this man. He was not only to be a friend to her and her mother, but to Oliver as well. What on earth could her father have meant in thus bringing an enemy of his own into the camp?

'It might as well be three hundred pence, Lady Lenore,' said he, with emphasis.

'I know it is very little,' she said; 'but you know papa is poor.'

She had at first determined not to say to this man, 'my brother,' when she meant the heir, and now she had got as far as saying 'papa,' when she meant the Earl. This

indicated that already Mr. Pollock had been admitted into her confidence as a most favoured friend.

'Yes, I know the Earl,' said Mr. Pollock, gently waving his hand, and presuming nothing on the daughter's having called the Earl 'papa.' 'I know the Earl is not rich, but three hundred a year is simply nonsense. And one of my objects in coming down here is the hope that I may get the Earl to do something better for Lord Balehouse.'

'You will find papa has a strong will of his own,' she said. She now felt as much at home with him as with Hicks, the gardener.

'And yet I have excellent reason to hope I shall succeed,' said he, looking straight before him—if eyes like his might be ever said to look.

‘All I can say is that I wish you success.’

They were now at the end of the wood. At her suggestion they paused a while, in order that the Earl and Southwood might come up.

She felt very happy. By this time Jack had settled it all. This man here, whatever he might be, was evidently their friend. He had promised to get Oliver a larger allowance, and he looked like a man who was accustomed to keep his word. Mr. Pollock, whoever he was, seemed to have great influence over her father, and, so far as he had shown any disposition to use that influence, it had been in a direction favourable to her mother, her brother, and—she was about to add—herself, when she saw the Earl alone coming along the path towards them, and instead of adding

herself to the list of those likely to be benefited by Mr. Pollock's visit, she substituted the question,

'I wonder what has become of Jack?'

CHAPTER IX.

A GENTLE MATE.

WHEN the Earl reached where his daughter and Mr. Pollock stood, they both saw he was in a very bad temper. His brows were drawn tightly over his eyes, his mouth was slightly open, his nostrils dilated and contracted, and his breath came short.

All he said was,

‘Mr. Southwood has left us. He will not come to the Castle.’

‘Why?’ demanded Lady Lenore placidly.

The Earl affected not to hear the question, and by this Lady Lenore knew at once that angry words had passed between her father and her lover.

But how could her father be sure Jack would not return? Jack had told her he would see her again that evening, no matter how he fared with her father. Had Jack told her father he would come back? No. For Jack would not tell a lie, and he had promised her to come. Was her father, then, simply inventing this, or was he telling a deliberate lie? Most likely the latter.

But if Jack had spoken, why had the other given an unfavourable reply?—for, beyond all doubt, to judge by his manner, the reply had been unfavourable.

Pollock was conscious something had gone wrong, but he could not tell what.

It was plain there had been an angry interview between the two men, but why, that young man having gone abruptly away, and the Earl been left master of the field,

the Earl should display such very bad temper, he could not even guess. If the young man had any serious pretensions to the lady's hand, it was quite clear the father had a perfect right to dismiss him, and equally clear that the Earl had dismissed him. If the young people meant nothing serious, what, then, was there to be angry about?

A while the three walked on in silence.

Now, to Pollock, this silence was uncomfortable. Walking between an earl and a lady, neither of whom spoke, was eminently uncomfortable. He felt out of place. He was in fear of a sudden explosion and a scene, which would, in some way, damage his own plans.

Although he knew little or nothing of family affairs, he felt instinctively that to be present at any outbreak between daugh-

ter and father, would have a bad effect upon his prospects.

‘I have been telling Lady Lenore,’ said he, keeping his eyes fixed straight before him, ‘that I have tried my hand at a little gardening in London.’

‘More fool you for your pains,’ said the Earl sulkily.

Mr. Pollock ceased to look straight before him, and turned his unspeculative eyes into the bushes at the side further from the Earl, as though looking for hares under them.

‘Which do you mean, papa,’ said Lady Lenore, in a voice of perfect serenity, ‘that Mr. Pollock was a fool to make the garden, or to tell me of it?’

‘It must be that I was a fool to make the garden, for by no means could it be the other thing Lord Berkham meant.’

The Earl did not reply, but breathed more heavily than before.

‘What did you mean, papa?’ persisted Lady Lenore, with malice disguised by a smile of confiding and inquisitive innocence.

‘I mean,’ answered the Earl, almost fiercely, ‘that Mr. Pollock must be a fool to make any place which is surely, at some period or other, destined to become a platform for the defiance of his commands.’

Mr. Pollock looked sharply from the undergrowth at the edge of the path towards the centre of the wood, as though the hare had been startled and had scuttled off in that direction.

Now Lady Lenore knew for a certainty what had happened. Her lover had proposed, and had been sent about his business. But what had her father meant by

saying this had been made the platform on which to defy him? As far as she knew, there had been no commands from her father respecting John Southwood, and as far as she went, it would not have made the slightest difference whether there had or had not. Why should she trouble herself about what was in her father's mind? She had not the least intention of paying any regard to his wishes.

She laughed lightly, almost scornfully, and said,

‘I hope Mr. Pollock will not be so unfortunate as to meet with such very rebellious servants as you anticipate.’

‘No man knows what is in store for him when he confides in others,’ said the Earl savagely. He could not be more explicit before the financier, for it would not do openly to accuse his daughter of insub-

ordination in the presence of the man whom he wished to be his son-in-law.

Although Pollock was far from quick at this kind of fencing, he knew now that all the Earl's shafts were directed at his daughter. This was the time for him, Pollock, to strike the first blow in the lady's favour. But he felt himself quite unequal to the position. If the persons concerned had been plain Mr. and Miss Granley, he would have felt quite at his ease. But for years past it had been the ambition of his soul to be received as an equal by some historic family. This was the hour of his triumph, how was he to raise his hand against the man whose boots he would have blackened for a month to enjoy the proud privilege of afterwards alluding to the time when he, having a few days to spare, ran down to his friend, the Earl of Berkham's

place, Berkham Castle, you know, for a few mouthfuls of fresh air and a turn in Lord Berkham's preserves. But now here he was arrayed against the man from whom he had received that great honour. Mr. Pollock went no further than a harmless generality. He said,

‘But, my lord, there are some people to whom one might trust everything.’

‘Yes, trust everything and lose everything,’ said the Earl bitterly.

‘No, my lord, trust everything one had and win ten times by winning all the other had.’ Mr. Pollock looked at Lady Lenore and smiled.

Lady Lenore looked at him and smiled her very brightest.

‘Why he is not only on the side of mamma and Oliver, and myself, but he is on Jack’s side too,’ she thought.

‘She smiles at me! She smiles at me! Can she mean anything by smiling at me for taking her part against her father’s temper?’ asked Pollock mentally.

Lord Berkham saw the drift of the financier’s speech, and as it was in the line of his own desires he said nothing. But he knew that neither his daughter nor his guest knew what was in the mind of either.

Nothing more of any interest was said for a quarter of an hour, and then they had reached the courtyard of the Castle.

It was now growing dusk, and Mr. Pollock, having declared he would like to write a few notes, was led into the study, and here the party broke up, Lady Lenore going to her own room and the Earl to the private sitting-room of the Countess. He knocked, and having been told to enter, went in.

The Countess was seated in a low easy-

chair before the fire with a book in her hand. When she saw who it was she put down her book on a small table by her side and looked up with a smile. She invariably smiled when the Earl visited her; for was he not her lord and master, and she could smile without effort or meaning anything?

‘Hope you have enjoyed your walk, Berkham?’ she said, throwing herself back in her chair and clasping her hands in her lap.

‘I have not, madam, enjoyed my walk at all,’ said he, pacing hastily across the room. ‘I have not enjoyed my walk at all, and I may, in a great measure, thank you, madam, for the unpleasantness I have met with.’

‘Indeed! How lucky you would esteem yourself, Berkham, if you had to thank me for no other unpleasantness than you met to-day.’

‘Madam, I will not have you sneer at me.’

‘Sneer at you! *I* sneer at *you*! Why, Berkham, you know I am past that long ago. I could not dream of sneering at you now. What I say is the simplest truth.’

‘Truth or lie I will be master here.’

‘Is it your wish that I should retire?’

She rose and stood calmly before him, with head thrown back in disdain, and foot advanced in act to go.

He was pacing up and down the room with quick and feverish steps, and trembling in all his limbs as he walked.

‘Sit down, madam, sit down!’ he shouted at the top of his shrill, jarring voice.

She drew back a step, held up her arm for silence, and said in the same unruffled voice,

‘If you desire that the servants should

hear what you say to me, let me summon them. They can hear but imperfectly through the doors and passages.'

She held out her other arm towards the bell.

'Ay!' he shouted, 'ring—*if you dare.*'

She moved deliberately to the bell-rope and pulled it. Then turning her back to him, she leaned her elbow on the chimney-piece, and looked into the fire.

The servant entered the room, stood awhile inside the door, but no one spoke. At last he said,

'Did your ladyship please to ring?'

'I did, Baker,' she answered, without turning round. 'His lordship will give you your orders.'

The man faced the Earl and bowed.

'Go to the devil, Baker!' cried the Earl furiously.

The man stepped backward a pace towards the door, and then paused a moment.

‘Do as your master bids you,’ said the Countess, in the same quiet unmoved voice, and without stirring.

The man opened the door, backed out, and closed the door softly after him.

For a moment the Earl was paralysed, breathless with rage. He had to support himself by the back of a chair. Then with the feverish haste of rage, he strode to where she stood, and seizing her by the elbow, turned her round until she faced him.

She was taller and more massive than he; morally, mentally, physically, she was his superior, and as she turned around and confronted him, there was in her look the pity of conscious superiority, regarding something beneath it.

He, blinded so by his fury, saw nothing of this, cried out fiercely,

‘Do you, madam, *dare* to make a laughing-stock of me in my own house, to my own servants?’

‘I am even bolder than that,’ she said softly; ‘I dare live in your house, and no woman alive dare more.’

He looked at her in speechless fury for a moment; throwing her arm from him, he flung himself into a chair with a groan. His physical resources were exhausted, and for a few minutes he could not speak.

During that time, no sound broke the silence, but the ticking of the little clock on the inlaid table near the fire, the faint murmur of the trees in the wind, and the uneasy breathing of the exhausted man.

As he sat there, pale and panting, he felt he was not equal to the strife. He felt

now as he had felt in all conflicts with his wife, during the past twenty years, that his defeat was inevitable. She always remained calm, while he wore himself out with passion.

He might as well fling himself against the Western Tower, and hope to beat it down with his naked fists.

It had occurred in a hundred encounters with his wife before, that having resolved to speak to her on a certain subject, he had spent all his force on a mere preliminary and almost irrelevant issue, as in the present case. He knew she was willing, nay, eager to leave his roof if he told her ; but it would not suit him that she should go. Against whom, then, should he storm with impunity? Although against her he might storm in vain, it was a satisfaction to his mean, corrupt nature, to feel there was one being

powerless, or at least unwilling to save herself from his outrageous onslaughts.

She had never refused to stand up before him and hear him speak. If he put her away from him, he would have to allow her alimony. As it was, she never intruded or interfered with him, and if he sought a separation, she would, in all likelihood, be allowed more than he now gave her.

From his point of view, everything went in favour of her continuing to live under his roof.

From her point of view, everything was against it, save one, and that ten million times outweighed all—the thought of her son and daughter.

True, Oliver had gone out into the world, but there was Lenore yet, and she knew that Oliver would look with a different

eye on Berkham, which must at some time be his, if she were no longer there.

At last Lord Berkham sat up in his chair, and caught the elbows of it in his trembling hands. His face was white, and his eyes dull and filmy. He leaned forward still more, turned up his ashy face to his wife standing above him, and said,

‘Young Southwood has told me he wishes to marry your daughter. Now mark my words, I’ll burn Berkham over her head and yours before that whelp shall have your daughter, madam.’

Then he rose from his chair, and without another word tottered out of the room.

She stood motionless for a while. Then turning round, rang the bell once more, sat down in her chair, and resumed her novel.

When Baker entered she said quietly,
‘Will you request Lady Lenore to come
to me, if she is not particularly engaged?’
Then she resumed her reading.

CHAPTER X.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN Lady Lenore entered her mother's room, she found the Countess still busy with her book.

'I hope I have not disturbed you, child?' asked the mother, putting away the volume, and motioning her daughter to take a chair by her side.

'I was about to come to you, mamma. I have such a lot to tell you.'

'Indeed,' said the mother, affectionately taking her daughter's hand. 'And is your news good or bad?'

'Well, I hardly know,' answered Lady Lenore, colouring brightly. 'In the first place, John Southwood has—'

‘I know, my darling. Of course, I have been prepared for it. He has proposed to you.’

‘Yes, mamma.’

‘And what did my girl say?’

‘Were you not prepared for that also?’ asked Lady Lenore shyly.

‘Well, yes, my darling, I suppose I was,’ said the mother, with a sigh.

Her son had already left her, and here was her daughter, who was dearer than all the world besides, willing to take wing, and fly away.

It was only natural, she reflected. It was no more than the experience of every poor mother who had had the happiness to bring up daughters to maidenhood.

But all mothers were not as she. All her life had been devoted to her young ones. From a few years after her marriage,

her life had been narrowed down to the simple cares and duties of a country lady, who saw no company, upheld no state, never visited town, and was in such straitened circumstances, that many a farmer's wife on the estate had more influence, freedom, and luxuries.

When she finally gave up all hope of reclaiming her dissolute, unprincipled husband, she made over all her great heart to her two children.

Her strength was great so long as her need of strength was great; but she felt that once her protecting power was no longer wanted, she should sink.

When they were safe, what more should she have to do? Nothing, nothing. Ah! nothing, dreariest of all occupations for the mind that is heavily burdened.

The daughter caught the meaning of

that heavy sigh, and throwing her arms round her mother, cried,

‘O mamma, mamma, mamma, how can I ever leave you! I never can, I never will!’

For a moment the mother was mute. She pressed her daughter, her only daughter, her fair pure child, to her bosom, and a few tears forced themselves through her unwilling lids. She waited until she had brushed away her tears, until she knew her voice was firm again. Then she spoke,

‘Nora, my darling Nora, every mother that lived has foreseen such changes, and ought to be prepared for them, unless she is a very weak and silly woman, and since you lay a tiny baby in my arms, I have been schooling my heart to bear this separation, and my own child, my own Nora, I should not have one uneasy thought

about myself, dear, if I were only sure of you.'

'Sure of me, mamma, sure of me! Of my love for you? Do you think I can ever forget all you have been to me, all you have done for me those weary years? O, mamma mamma, you do not think that?'

'No, my Nora. How could you fancy me capable of such a thought? But there are other circumstances, child.'

'I know,' said Nora, very softly. 'I know, mamma; but then I do love him, O so much, so much!'

'My poor child.'

'Poor, because I love him and he loves me! How can you for a moment, mother, call me poor? I am very, very rich. I would not change places with any one I know, with any one I have ever heard or read of.'

‘My love, I think you have every cause to rejoice in your lover. I am your mother, and, Heaven knows, no one could have your interest more at heart than I. It is not because of him I am uneasy. But your father—’

‘My father!’ cried Lady Lenore, suddenly disengaging herself from her mother’s arms, and sitting upright in her own chair. ‘What has my father to do with this? What has he ever had to do with me that he should now presume to interfere? Mamma, I tell you plainly, once for all, I will listen to nothing from him.’

‘But, Nora, you must remember that no matter what he may have done or omitted to do, he is your father yet, and if you owe him no respect—’

‘Respect!’ she cries scornfully. ‘Who owes him respect?’

‘You at least owe him obedience.’

‘No more than to the Emperor of Morocco.’

‘My dear, my dear, you are over-excited. You must not say such things. It hurts me to hear my daughter say such things.’

The attitude and tone of the girl instantly relaxed and changed, and stretching out her hands to her mother, suppliantly, she said,

‘Forgive me, mamma, forgive me. I am very sorry for anything wrong I have said. But as you tell me I am his child too, you must think of that when I shock you. You have borne with him all your life, because he was your husband. Will you bear a little with me, mother, because I am your husband’s child?’

And she threw herself once more on

her mother's bosom, and sobbed hysterically.

'Hush, hush, Nora !' cried the mother, folding her again to her bosom. 'You have been terribly excited, and you did not exactly know what you said.'

'I could not have known what I said if it has pained you.'

'There now, pet, rest yourself there awhile in your own old resting-place, your mother's arms, and you will be calm. There, now, darling, you are better already. Do not check your tears or your sobs, you will be all right in a few minutes.'

After a while the violence of the paroxysm passed away, and Lady Lenore became calm, and lay back in her chair, holding her handkerchief across her face to save her eyes from the firelight.

This was the moment of reaction, one

at which the Countess knew the faculties being all dull, and the emotions exhausted, new matters of grief may be communicated without producing any marked measure of depression.

If she had deferred her communication until morning, if she had left her daughter any loophole, however small, by which hope could steal in secretly all night long, by morning the same scene would have to be gone over anew. Now was the time to close up that loophole and keep out hope. Lady Berkham said,

‘Just before I sent for you, Nora, your father left me. He had been speaking to me about the very matter we have just talked of.’

‘And what did he say?’ Lady Lenore sat up.

‘I am greatly afraid, Nora, that from

what he said he is not in favour of Mr. Southwood.'

'I feel quite sure of that. I knew it by his manner.'

'Whose manner, my dear?'

'My father's manner in the wood.'

And then she told her mother, as far as a confiding daughter might tell a sympathetic mother, all that had happened in the wood, omitting little brief passages which concerned only Jack and herself.

But her mother had kept her heart young for her children's sake, and even went so far as to guess what the Earl and Mr. Pollock might have seen.

According as Lady Lenore's narrative went on a new light broke in upon the Countess, and as her daughter finished, she said,

'Nora, do you know what all this means?'

‘No, mother, I have not the slightest idea. What does it mean?’

Lady Berkham stood up. A half-indignant, half-amused smile spread over her features as she said,

‘Nora, your father wishes you to marry this Mr. Pollock.’

For a moment mother and daughter stood regarding one another minutely, then the younger one said,

‘Mamma, this is the farce after the tragedy,’ and then both burst out into a long laugh.

At that moment the first bell rang for dinner.

CHAPTER XI.

'ACROSS THE WALNUTS AND THE WINE.

BEFORE the second bell rang, Baker came to Lord Berkham with word that neither of the ladies was well enough to appear at dinner.

Although the Earl was fully prepared for this news, he became furious when it reached him. But he was exhausted by the scene through which he had just passed, and after a few violent expressions, not of the most pious character, he began to regard the absence of his wife and daughter as a not unmixed evil.

No doubt the matter would look strange in Pollock's eyes, but he, the Earl, should try and make the best excuse he could.

Pollock was in the drawing-room, and upon his apologising for the absence of the ladies, he found the financier not only unruffled, but cordial over the disappointment. The fact was Mr. Pollock's social advancement had been too rapid for him, and he was now grateful for a brief respite. He felt that to have become the guest of an earl, shaken hands with a countess, and walked through a wood with the daughter of that earl on his arm were glories enough for one day, without adding to them the supreme honour of taking a countess in to dinner in her own house.

Mr. Pollock was afraid of no man, but there was something in even the rustle of a fine lady's dress which filled the financier with uneasiness.

Although the owner of St. Austin's Towers aspired to marry a woman far above

him in social rank, he was not so great a fool as to believe he and she were equal.

He was a shrewd man of business, quite devoid of any of the meannesses of business, and, as far as he had experience of it, he was a shrewd man of the world. He knew that Lady Berkham had sprung from the class to which he belonged, but the house of which she came had been established for generations, while he was the first of his race to step out of the enormous family of the Nameless into the select band of the Known.

The dinner at Berkham Castle was not nearly so good as one Mr. Pollock could get at the Gog and Magog. Berkham was in an isolated part of the Midlands, in which salt-water fish was exceedingly hard to get, and the fresh-water fish which could be got was hardly worth cooking. Hence there was

no fish that day at the Castle dinner. The wines were less than ordinary. In fact on such a low scale did the ladies at the Castle live, that the wine-cellar was a poetic abstraction, and the few bottles forming the store of the Countess found humble but ample accommodation in the butler's pantry, to which, by the way, there was no butler attached, Baker being the sole domestic man-servant retained at the Castle, the butler's pantry was in charge of the cook. The price of a couple of dozen of the brown sherry, to be found only at the Gog and Magog and St. Austin's Towers, would have been more than sufficient to pay for all the wine in Berkham Castle.

Of such wine, however, as the butler's pantry afforded, Lord Berkham drank liberally that day at dinner. By the time

Baker retired and left the gentlemen to themselves, his lordship was almost in a pleasant humour.

'We live like anchorites here,' said the Earl, when the two were alone.

'And, like the monks of old,' said Mr. Pollock suavely, 'you have chosen the prettiest site in the county for the scene of your mortification.'

'Ay, mortification, truly; for when I look out of my window I cannot see my own fields, my own trees, my own farms.'

'I do not understand you,' said the financier.

'Well, when I look out of my window I can see nothing but a screen of mortgages.'

'Which may much more easily be disposed of than a screen of canvas.'

'Well, my dear Pollock, I know you

are a man of resources, using that word in more senses than one. You were about to say something to me to-day, and I asked you to defer the subject until to-morrow; but I really don't see any reason why you should not mention it now. I know that's a very poor wine, but it is the best we have. I am seldom at home, and the less women know of wine the better.'

'Thank your lordship—'

'Now look here, Pollock, if we are going to talk pleasantly, let us talk like friends, not like an Act of Parliament drawn by an amateur draughtsman with a strong taste for formalities. Drop my lordship. Call me Berkham, that's my name. Pretty low, I am! Why, Pollock, I couldn't pay the fees of an earl's patent now! I'm broke horse and foot. Confound this claret, it will not pass my gorge.

Give me the brandy. As you were saying—Ah, that brandy is good! It is some of a lot I bought when I was as well off as one of your clerks.'

Mr. Pollock did taste the brandy and abandoned the claret for it. The liquor was a great improvement on what he had been drinking. He had his own cigar-case, which was filled with cigars such as did not often find their way into the market. He had been begged by an earl to drop 'lord-ing' him, and he was about to propose to an earl for the hand of his lordship's daughter. He put the brandy again to his lips before he spoke,

'You are aware that I am what the world calls a rich man—'

'An exceedingly rich man,' said the Earl, as though the words nourished him.

'Well, a very rich man, if you like. I

have been marvellously successful. No man in my time has had such luck. But I have not been speculating as much as you might suppose. Some years ago, I own, I ran enormous risks; but of late I have gone into nothing that was not absolutely safe—'

'What about that ten thousand you lent me?'

'I am now talking of matters of importance, not of trifles. Of late years I have, however, been almost as prudent as I once was daring. I am at present, as you know, sole proprietor of one of the largest silver-mines in the world. It has been ascertained that my mine will yield four hundred thousand a year for thirty years.'

'And I've heard you bought it cheap?' said the Earl, with unction.

'For a song,' said the financier, as though a song had as well-known a value

as a sovereign or a franc. 'As I was saying, once I speculated largely, now I go into nothing that is not safe. At this moment I do not own a share in any unlimited company, and from moneys safely invested here and there, I have an income of more than I get out of the mine. In addition to which, I have the profits of my ordinary Lombard-street business.'

'My dear Pollock, I had no idea you were so rich. You are much better off than the richest nobleman in England.'

'I have a larger income, my lord.'

'“My lord” be ——!'

'But,' said the financier gravely, 'in view of what I am about venturing to say, it is most important you should keep in mind the vast difference there is between the position your lordship occupies and that occupied by me.'

‘Well, go on, Pollock,’ cried his lordship; ‘but for Heaven’s sake attach as little importance to my being a pauper earl, without the advantage of a pension, and go on with what you have to say.’

‘My lord—’

‘Confound it, Pollock, drop that!’

‘My lord, suppose a man in my position—a man who, like me, had no father or mother, in the sense your lordship has a father or mother, a man who had begun at the end of the ladder and climbed up no higher than a good high rung of wealth, were to ask you if you would have any objection to—to—to—’

‘Out with it,’ cried the Earl, waving his glass of brandy in the air, and smiling gaily.

‘His forming an alliance with your lordship’s family?’

'My dear Pollock, no more than I should have in smoking another of your very excellent cigars.'

'In such a case, of course, all the debts of the Berkham property would be paid off, and a most handsome provision made for the Lady Lenore.'

'Ah, Pollock, you are too generous.'

'And now, your lordship, I think it would be no harm if we went a little into detail.'

'With all my heart,' said Lord Berkham, stretching out his legs, lighting another of Mr. Pollock's excellent cigars, and filling another glass of brandy-and-water.

CHAPTER XII.

DETAILS.

AFTER a brief pause Mr. Pollock proceeded:

‘Your lordship will excuse me if I allude to your own affairs?’

‘I’ll excuse you anything except lordshipping me. My own confounded affairs are in an infernal pickle.’

‘As far as I can gather from what you have confided to me, the Berkham estate is now very heavily encumbered.’

‘It is swallowed up altogether. I shall have to become a professional diner-out soon, if I wish to keep body and soul together. Now that we are talking of the subject, put me down on your list, or give me a permanent invitation to drop in when-

ever I haven't half-a-crown for a steak and pint of bitter.'

'Your lordship knows St. Austin's Towers desire no guest so much as the Earl Berkham, except—'

'Except Lord Berkham's absence.'

'Except the presence of Lord Berkham's daughter—not, however, as a guest, but as mistress.'

The financier bowed profoundly in his chair to the Earl. The Earl rolled his cigar around in his mouth and breathed heavily. For a while neither spoke. At length the Earl leaned forward, held out his hand to his guest, and said:

'My dear Pollock, you have my fullest approval. I know of no one I would prefer to you.'

Mr. Pollock took the hand of the other and shook it cordially. He had, of course,

been in no fear that his host would throw any obstacles in the way; but, although he had anticipated success, the assurance of it was now scarcely less dear to him than if he had been in suspense. When he spoke he said:

‘I am sure I am very much obliged to your lordship.’

He would not even now drop his host’s title, for he wished the Earl to understand he was quite conscious of the great social gap between them.

With Lady Lenore for a wife, he would be much better off than the mere City baronets of the Gog and Magog.

‘I am sure I am very much obliged to your lordship for the kind words you have used towards me, and I cannot tell you how deeply I feel the honour you have done me in giving me permission to address Lady

Lenore with the view to making her my wife.'

'Why, it's a settled thing. She shall be your wife. I am master in my own house. I have always been master in my own house, and by —— I am not going to be set aside now by a jade and an interloping jackanapes. Pollock, you have my word for it, and you shall have her too, as sure as I am sitting here. Things would have come to a pretty pass if I had to ask my own daughter's opinion, or the opinion of Mr. Southwood, in such a matter. No, no, no! It hasn't come quite to that yet, and I promise you my word as a gentleman that Lady Lenore shall be Lady Lenore Pollock before twelve months are up.'

As the Earl had said, the claret was poor, but the brandy was excellent. All the tremulousness had now left his lord-

ship, his face was slightly flushed, and it was quite plain that—he had dined. Not that he was now the worse because of what he had drunk; it had improved him, except that it had made him a little more violent in manner and language.

At the moment, too, it would have been unpleasant for his wife or daughter, or John Southwood, to come in his way.

But his humanity had been improved by the brandy, and his friendship glowed and burned towards Pollock, with a fervour never reached before.

To Mr. Pollock's ears never had come sweeter sounds than when the Earl spoke of the financier's future wife as Lady Lenore Pollock.

He leaned back in his chair, and for a while mentally surveyed his future home with Lady Lenore Pollock at the head of

it, the name of Lady Lenore Pollock on invitations to his house. He had, of course, often thought of the matter before, but until now it had always seemed shadowy and far off.

He did not pretend to himself that he was in love at first sight with this man's daughter; but it was a remarkable coincidence that, in the only whim of fancy in which he had indulged all his life—that respecting the portrait—his spirit had seemed to be prophetic.

He had looked at Lady Lenore, and had found her more fair than the picture. This had been a pleasant surprise. It may have been, that had he been consulting only the ideal of female loveliness, he would have chosen a type less fragile, less refined.

But he was no sentimental young man in search of a sweetheart, but a practical

man of the world, wanting a wife who could advance his social position; and here he had found the woman who would suit in every way.

And then, having come to the conclusion Lady Lenore was, from his original stand-point, all that could be desired, it was in a subtle and remote way flattering that the only flight of fancy in which he had ever indulged, should turn out to be connected with the woman who now seemed destined to be his wife. At last he spoke:

‘I am sure I cannot express to you my sense of the honour you do me in taking up my cause so warmly. I know there are many things against me—’

‘But I am with you, and in this matter I count for everything!’ cried the Earl hotly.

The guest bowed. 'Of course,' he said, 'I should make satisfactory settlements.'

'I am perfectly sure you will be more than generous,' said the other, in a tone of the firmest conviction.

'I have no one in the world looking to me for a shilling, not a relation alive, and, consequently, all would go to Lady Lenore and her children. My notion is this, setting aside by settlement the profits of the silver-mine to be applied as we may agree, to the purpose of buying land, or investing in other unquestionably good security for the children, with a jointure charge upon the gross, for whatever time the widow might survive me.'

'That would be magnificent!' exclaimed his lordship. 'I think you said it was about four hundred thousand a year?'

'About that; and we may count cer-

tainly on twenty or thirty years more of it; and when that time is over, there may be yet more silver for all we know to the contrary. In the mean time, I think I could scrape together enough to live comfortably on, as I have told you.'

'You have been an amazingly lucky man, Pollock,' said the Earl. 'We poor rats of peers never have any such luck as that.'

'I have been very lucky, Lord Berkham.'

'I wish you would drop that lording me. It sounds, after what you have told me, like satire. It is I who ought to lord you. Why, half of your income for one year would buy up the whole Berkham estate. Only fancy that! If you retire, they'll make a peer of you in ten years. They can't help it. You can't help it.

When a man has got millions, either the Whigs or Tories must make a peer of him, if it was for nothing else but to keep his subscription to the election fund out of the pockets of the other side. You give them fifty or a hundred thousand every General Election, and they must make a peer of you for your "long and important services to the party."

'I do not aim so high. I should be much content with lesser honours. But I was about to say a while ago, that I have been a very lucky man all my life, but I should consider it my greatest stroke of luck if I am as fortunate to gain the goodwill of Lady Lenore, as I have gained the good-will of her father.'

'My dear Pollock, dismiss that doubt altogether from your mind. It is finally disposed of. I shall take it ill of you

if you refer to it in any terms of doubt again.'

'Well, then, there is another matter I want to speak to you about. I have been very lucky all my life, and I hope to be still more lucky to the end. But I do not think it fair that all the luck should be on my side. I think you ought to have a share.'

'How on earth am I? You don't expect me to live after Lenore, and inherit your property?'

And the Earl laughed, for he suspected the nature, at least, of what was coming.

'What do you think is the total of the mortgages on the Berkham estate?'

'A hundred and thirty to a hundred and forty thousand pounds.'

'Well, suppose I take them all up, and

they all get burned on the day Lady Lenore is married? Would not that—'

'My dear, dear fellow, I could not think of it.'

At the same time, he was thinking a great deal about it.

'Yes. There's my hand. I'll do that, Berkham, as I'm a man.'

At last he thought he might drop the title.

The Earl grasped his hand warmly, mutely.

At the same moment another pair of hands were clasped under the walls of that dining-room, and a man's voice asked,

'Are you free to come now, Nora?'

And the woman's voice answered only,

'Hush, Jack, until we get farther away.'

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE DARK.

WHEN Lady Lenore and John Southwood had got a few yards away from the window of the dining-room, he spoke again.

‘Now are you ready? Will you come?’

‘I cannot.’

‘Cannot! Why cannot? What has changed your mind since to-day?’

‘Well, Jack, it is a very prosaic fact. If I ran away now with you my father could follow us and bring me back, and then our second condition would be worse than our first. To-day I did not know. I thought I was free to do as I please, but since, I have found out I am not.’

‘Who on earth told you? You did not say anything to the Earl himself?’

‘You cannot imagine I was so silly. No; I spoke to mamma. She and I had a long conversation, and it would be simply folly and nonsense for us to think of running away when we might be followed. I told mamma what—what—what—I know. What I said to you and you said to me in the wood to-day, and she was quite pleased, but she says she thinks the Earl will never give in, and Jack, now I shall make you laugh.’

‘Do at once, then, for I am in the bluest of humours.’

‘She says she is sure that the Earl has brought down Mr. Pollock, our guest, with—with—with a view to— Ah, it is too funny.’

‘With a view to what, Nora?’

‘With a view to me.’

‘With a view to you? I am as much in the dark as ever. What do you mean by a view to you?’

‘Well, don’t be stupid, Jack. Mamma thinks the Earl intends Mr. Pollock to be your rival.’

Southwood did not laugh.

His face was invisible in the dark, damp October evening.

She could feel the arm upon which she leaned, she could hear his breathing.

Beyond these evidences she had no knowledge of his presence, for it was pitch dark, and they were walking under trees which had not yet wholly lost their leaves.

Above the trees spread a black vault, in which no star shone, from which no ray descended. All round them spread a vast calm, through which now and then pierced

the sounds of a far-off town. The breeze, which had moved through the parched wood in the day, had died away. The withered leaves were no longer crisp and brisk, but sodden and dull as churchyard clay. There was no spirit of life, no spring of joy, no wholesomeness in the time.

Not only did John Southwood not laugh, but in the black darkness of the night his face was troubled—angry.

When a man in a love affair is told he has a rival, no matter how far removed from the chance of success that rival may be, the lover's mind discovers, for a while at any rate, matter of more interest in that rival than in the woman he loves herself.

Instead, therefore, of laughing at the notion that Pollock could possibly steal away Nora from him, Southwood's mind

was now wholly occupied on Mr. Pollock himself, in so far as Mr. Pollock had been revealed to him in the short space he had seen him.

‘Why don’t you laugh, Jack?’ asked Lady Lenore, pressing his arm, and trying to pierce the darkness and see his face.

She did not like his want of mirth. It was as though he had in mind grave reasons for thinking there might be something in the supposed pretensions of Mr. Pollock.

‘I don’t see exactly what there is to laugh at. Since you will not place yourself in my hands, but will remain here, I cannot say what may happen.’

‘O, Jack! Surely you don’t think I am going to be influenced by anyone?’

‘Not by me?’

‘I mean by anyone but you.’

‘But, if you are to be influenced by me,

why can't you make up your mind to run away from danger and persecution ?'

'There is no danger, and I don't think there will be any persecution. Remember, mother only imagines what she said. The Earl has not spoken to her about it.'

'But, Nora, what are we to do? Your father has forbidden me this place. He has rejected me with contempt. If he met me now he would order me off the ground with curses. What are we to do? I cannot meet you again while this man is here. Nora, what are we to do?'

'This man will not stay long, and the Earl is sure to go away with him, and then all will be well with us.'

She had not in all this interview spoken of Lord Berkham as her father. She had made up her mind she would never think of him as a father again. He had cruelly

neglected her mother, her brother, and herself, and now he claimed a right over her which belonged not to the best of fathers, and to which he had no shadow of claim.

‘I wish Oliver would run down for a few days,’ said the young man.

‘Ah, that would be delightful. This Mr. Pollock knows Oliver, and is going to try and get Oliver’s allowance increased. He is very friendly to Oliver.’

‘Friendly towards Oliver? Can Oliver know anything of his pretensions? Surely, Oliver knows about you and me?’

‘I think he suspects about you and me, but I am not sure. If there is anything in mamma’s suspicion, I am sure Oliver knows nothing about it. I know he likes you, Jack, and I’m sure he—he couldn’t think of any one he’d—he’d be so glad I’d be fond of.’

‘O, Oliver and I will get on all right, my darling. But who on earth can this this Mr. Pollock be? Oliver mever mentioned his name to me.’

‘Nor to me.’

‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Nora, darling—write a strong letter to Oliver, and ask him to come down at once. I’ll give him no particulars. I’ll only say that you and I have settled things, and that there are very pressing reasons for his immediate presence at Berkham.’

‘That’s a good fellow, do that. It will be well for all of us, and I am sure mamma will be delighted. Oliver must come. Say I said so.’

After a lover’s parting he left her, and she returned to the Castle.

When John Southwood got home that evening he sat down and wrote the following note:

‘Southwood Hall, Berkham, Oct. 18th,—

‘Dear Oliver,—I am disposed to believe you have not been ignorant of the nature of my feelings towards your sister Nora. Well, to spare you detail, I proposed to Nora to-day, and was accepted; and I spoke to your father to-day, and was denied.

Nora and I have met subsequently, and we both agree, not in any way to be influenced by the Earl. We are both quite sure that, in this matter, we have you on our side. Your mother’s approval is also with us.

‘Under ordinary circumstances, Nora and I could afford to wait a little while, until she is of age; but the conditions at the Castle now are not ordinary, but distinctly extraordinary; and Nora and I have come to the conclusion that your presence at Berkham is absolutely necessary.

‘I cannot give you full particulars, but I am quite confident if you don’t come, things will get into a queer state. Nora has told me to say, she most particularly wishes you to come.—Yours always,

‘JOHN SOUTHWOOD.’

Lord Balehouse received this letter and another from Berkham by the same post. The second ran thus:

‘*Berkham Castle, October 18th,*—

‘Dear Lord Balehouse,—This evening I had the honour of dining for the first time at Berkham Castle, with the Earl of Berkham. The ladies were indisposed, and did not come down. After dinner I had a long and most gratifying talk with the Earl; in the course of which I alluded to—without seeming to know anything about you—the injustice of rich or distinguished fathers placing their

sons in positions requiring money, without making a suitable allowance.

‘Whereupon he spoke of you; and I asked him what he allowed you, and he told me; and I said to him that I thought not less than twice what he now gives would be fair. And, straightway, he said he would double your lordship’s allowance. He also said other things, which led me to believe that a meeting here, between you and him, while I am on the spot, would be most advantageous to you.

‘I am confirmed in this opinion by a few words his lordship let fall as we parted. I need not tell you that I have been so guarded in all I have said about you to the Earl, that he thinks I have been speaking to him of some one I have never seen.

‘I am sure you ought to come here at once. You must not, for a moment, fancy

I carry any memory of business out of Lombard-street.—I am, my lord, your lordship's most obedient servant,

‘ANDREW POLLOCK.’

When Lord Balehouse read these letters, he found himself in a position of no slight difficulty. He had no wish whatever to go to Berkham while his father and Pollock were there; and yet, here was Pollock—to whom he was under deep obligation—asking him to come; and here were Nora and Southwood asking him to come too.

He supposed there was nothing for it, but to get leave and start for Berkham next day. And this he did.

CHAPTER XIV.

‘TWO THOUSAND POUNDS!’

Nothing short of necessity could have induced Lord Balehouse to visit Berkham just then; but he had no choice.

It was a horribly unpleasant thing to find this Mr. Pollock, who had so generously given him the money, here on intimate terms with his own family. Much as he would have shrunk from acquainting his father with that Lombard-street transaction, he would have shrunk a thousand times more from telling his mother of it. It would make his father fly into a rage and swear at him. It would pain his mother deeply; and he would rather be horsewhipped in Canonbury Barrack-yard

by his father than be the cause of his mother's tears. He had a thorough contempt and dislike for his father. For his mother he had a profound and devoted love. His was a softer, less defiant nature than Lady Lenore's.

When his father and he met, and disagreed, he did not defy the Earl, he simply walked away or held his peace. This was partly owing to indolence, for he was one of those constitutionally lazy men, who, though as firm as a rock in their resolves, are almost as impassive under the protestations of those they do not trust.

The first time after his arrival at Berkham that Lord Balehouse found himself alone with any member of the family, was with the Countess in her own room.

He drew an easy-chair in front of the fire, and seated himself leisurely in it.

He had heard absolutely nothing yet beyond what the letters had told him. When he came into the room the Countess was engaged in embroidering a kettle-holder for the local bazaar. She could afford to make no costly presents.

The Countess did not put down her work. She could talk better to her son with work in her hand than without it. Light occupation of such a kind helps to clear up thought.

‘I suppose you know, mother, that I have come down because John and Nora wished me?’

‘Nora told me John Southwood had written to you. She also told me he had told you that he has proposed to Nora—’

‘Yes, and that it is all settled between them.’

The Countess paused a moment in her work, and looked up into his face with a quiet smile.

'Yes, all settled between *them*, but then there's the Earl. He has other views for Nora.'

'Other views?' said the young man cautiously. 'What are my father's views?'

'I guessed before he told me. I told Nora half in jest I thought he intended this Mr. Pollock to marry her. Now I am sure of it.'

'Mr. Pollock, mother—Mr. Pollock!'

'Yes, Oliver. This Mr. Pollock is something in the City, and enormously rich. The Earl will hear of no objection or demur.'

'Then, by Heavens, he shall hear of objection and demur from one person! I, any way, will not stand by and see this

done, because my father happens to be a heartless spendthrift.'

He sat upright in his chair, and struck his leg violently. A moment before it would have seemed as though no power on earth could move him so powerfully. But suddenly rushed in upon his mind all that his father had done against those whom he—the son—loved most in the world.

The Earl had married his mother for money, and then squandered her fortune, and treated her shamefully. He had neglected all his life long his duties to his family, and had never cared whether his family was dead or alive. And now he wanted to crown all by selling an only daughter, his darling sister, to a common stock-jobber, or usurious Jew. He here struck his leg again, and said,

'No, not if I have to take her away from him by force!'

'Oliver, Oliver!' cried the mother, softly folding her hands on her work, and looking up with a glance of gentle reproach, 'you must not be so violent, you really must not. If we are to talk about the matter, we must talk about it quietly. Who is this Mr. Pollock? You seem to have met him before.'

'O, yes, I met him before. I met him in London. I met him only once. He is enormously rich. A banker, I think, or a financier, or something of that kind.'

Then for a moment his anger left him, and he felt what a cruel surprise it would be if his mother learned he had borrowed two thousand pounds of this man.

After this the thought of how this misfortune, for now he looked on that fact of

borrowing as an unqualified misfortune, had been the natural result of his father's penurious treatment of him as regarded an allowance.

Instantly he forgot all the awkwardness of his own position, and thought only of the unworthy and shameful conduct of his father, and he made up his mind with additional vehemence, that, come what might, Andrew Pollock should never marry Nora.

‘You must remember, Oliver—you must always remember, Oliver, that I come of business people.’

‘O, mother, there is no comparison! Your family had been well known nearly as long as the Granleys. And, besides, we all know that men in the position of my father often marry the daughters of business men and professional men, and so on.

But this man is only just sprung from the mud—from the gutter.'

'How do you know all this about him?'

'Jervais told me. Jervais knows all about him. Jervais is no end of a good fellow, I can tell you, mother. And this Pollock isn't a bad fellow. He's a very good fellow indeed, but he isn't good enough for Nora.'

'My dear, Oliver, you must not, for a moment, fancy I am an advocate of your father's views about Nora. I am not. I think John Southwood an excellent young man—'

'And so do I, and there is only one other person I'd rather she married.'

'And who is that?' asked the mother with a smile.

'William Jervais.'

'The Captain of your troop!' said she.

‘Why, you are more unreasonable than your father! She has never seen him.’

‘I know she hasn’t, and I am quite satisfied with Southwood.’

‘Your father says, most emphatically, that she shall marry this man.’

‘And we say, most emphatically, that she shall not. So that it is open war.’

‘No, Oliver, not open war. I think quiet resistance will be much more effective. On the Earl’s part, no doubt it will be open war. But we need not do anything more than passively resist. It’s much more effective and not nearly so fatiguing.’

‘You are right, mother. You always are. But how is it to be done?’ asked he, getting up out of the chair and lounging awkwardly up and down the room with his hands thrust very deep into his trousers pockets, and a look of gloom upon his face.

'He cannot, of course, oblige her to marry him, and she will soon be of age.'

'No, and he can't boil her alive in oil.'

'Oliver, I will not have such violent things said. He has forbidden John Southwood to come here—'

'But Southwood isn't such a fool as to mind what the Earl said? Is he? I used to like him, but if he keeps away I shall have to reconsider my opinion.'

'Mr. Southwood is a gentleman, and if your father tells him he must not come here of course he will stay away.'

'If Southwood cares as much for Nora as she deserves to be cared for, and if he stays away because the Earl tells him, he is a sneak. That's all.'

'Well, we will say nothing of that just now. There is one great thing in our favour. Mr. Pollock has come for only a

few days, and it is not likely your father will remain after he has gone, so we shall have plenty of opportunity for talking over the matter. Your father has gone even farther than forbidding John Southwood to come here, he has told Nora she must hold no kind of communication whatever with him.'

'Ah, well, mother, as you said a moment ago, we need not trouble ourselves with that now. I certainly, for one, should not think she would feel she had done anything very dreadful if she had forgotten all about that command by this time. What did she say when he told her?'

'He did not tell her personally. He sent word through me.'

'And what did she say to you?' asked Lord Balehouse, drawing up before his mother.

'O, she is almost more rebellious even than you. She is indeed.'

'Well, I think we're safe to win anyway now, for you are the most rebellious of the three. You know you are, mother. As sure as you are sitting there before me, you would rather lose your right arm than see Lenore marry this Mr. Andrew—'

'Pollock, come this way. This is her ladyship's private room. She will be delighted to see you here.'

Lord Balehouse's sentence was finished by his father, who had that moment opened the door, and was holding it open for the financier.

Before Lord Berkham had finished speaking, the other man was bowing profoundly to the lady.

The guest then turned, and bowed almost as deeply to the heir.

‘It was very good of you to come,’ said the hostess, with a smile. ‘I am quite out of the way here, and have no pretty things, the sight of which might repay you for your trouble. Unless, indeed, it is the view from the windows, which many people admire.’

He wanted to say something—and even he knew what he wanted to say; but he shrank from saying it for fear he might blunder.

He wanted to tell her that the privilege of being admitted to her society, for ever so brief a period, would more than repay him for a thousand times the trouble. But he durst not say it.

So he forbore, and went to a window and looked out, and merely said,

‘A very lovely view. A most beautiful view, indeed.’

'Ah, but,' said the Earl, with a desperate attempt at joviality, 'we did not come to admire your landscape, Countess, but to tell you Mr. Pollock is going to give you a splendid treat.'

'A splendid treat!' she said, with suavity.

'Yes. I have just accepted for you and Lenore, Mr. Pollock's invitation to spend a few weeks at his magnificent palace in Brompton. You and Nora will be delighted with the place.'

'What, going to town in October? Is your lordship serious?'

'Perfectly.'

'But—'

'Your ladyship will have the goodness to observe there is no "but" in this matter. It is all arranged.'

'Mr. Pollock,' said Lord Balehouse softly, 'I shall go too.'

‘You, sir! you, sir!’ exclaimed the Earl.
‘I did not speak of you.’

‘No, my lord; but when Mr. Pollock was kind enough in London to lend me two thousand pounds a few days ago, he invited me to his place, and I now accept his invitation.’

Two thousand pounds!

The Countess uttered a low cry, and rose to her feet; the Earl shouted out an imprecation, and the financier swung swiftly round on his heel as though he had been struck, and stared at Lord Balehouse.

Lord Balehouse leaned against the framework of the window, quietly looking on at the consternation his confession had caused.

CHAPTER XV.

A QUARTETTE.

THE Earl was the first to speak. He turned his angry eyes away from his son, and looking at the financier, said,

‘Pollock, is this true? Is it true you have lent this wretched boy money?’

‘I am certainly glad Lord Balehouse will accept my old invitation to St. Austin’s Towers, and will come with your lordship and the ladies.’

‘Have you lent this wretched boy money?’ persisted the Earl.

‘It is a matter not worth talking of, and I beg your lordship not to refer to it again.’

A long pause followed.

At first the father was disposed to fly into a blind rage, and abuse his son; for had this son not only refused to join him in raising money on the property; had he not only when at school, contracted debts; but now, this selfish young man had borrowed two thousand pounds, when he knew that half that sum would have been looked upon by his father with an eye of envy?

It was too bad, when one regarded it in that way.

But Lord Berkham was a man who never lost sight of his own interests for a moment, and never indulged in violent temper, when there was a chance of such an indulgence costing him anything.

He was a man fond of luxury, but he did not count anger amongst the list of luxuries, except when he could give way to it without paying for it.

At an ordinary time, he would have railed at his son, and, most likely turned him out of doors. But before his anger had, in the present case, had time to form itself into words, his lordship saw the affair in a new light.

The Countess and Nora were, he knew, opposed to the idea of admitting Pollock into the family. The certainty was, that Oliver would also oppose it, if he were free to do so.

But was he free now? How could Oliver oppose, openly, the man who had lent him money, the man to whom he was under an obligation?

The Earl of Berkham was not without a fair quantity of shrewdness, and he was quite alive to the different ways in which he and his son would feel, in such a position as the latter was now in.

The former would not trouble himself so long as he was sure Pollock would not press him for repayment; the latter would be uneasy about some ridiculous feeling of honour.

Pollock was simply amazed at the boldness, recklessness of the young man. In fact, he had no clue to the situation, and could make nothing of it.

Why had Lord Balehouse suddenly decided upon accepting an invitation he had some time ago refused? And above everything, why had he, in the presence of his father and mother, spoken of that loan? What good purpose could be served by such an avowal there and then? A few days ago Lord Balehouse said he would rather not have the money at all than run the least risk of any knowledge of it coming to his father's ears. And now, here he was,

without any rhyme or reason, blazoning the whole thing. What would be the next move in this strange scene?

Intense pain and maternal yearning were the chief features in Lady Berkham's mind. She knew, as well as any one else, that three hundred a year was too small an allowance for a young man in the position of her son; and as far as the two thousand pounds went, she did not care at all. In fact, she never once thought of the money as money. But Nora had said to her the other day, that she, Nora, was daughter to her father, which, to the mother's heart, meant nothing, as she knew there was not a trace of the father's disposition in the girl. But here was Oliver, who had also no trace of the father's nature in him, borrowing money when he was only twenty-three years of age, and not saying anything

to her about it. Up to that moment she had believed that her son had no secrets from her, and now here was he with not only a secret, but with a secret which recalled to her mind with a pang of despair the recklessness of his father, and forced upon her the fact that at least one characteristic of the father had descended to her child. But on the whole what struck her mother's heart most powerfully was that her boy had outgrown reliance on her guidance.

There is nothing saddens the large sympathetic heart more than to find its sympathy pushed aside. As we go further on in the race of life we go slower and slower.

We have carried our babies in the morning; we have helped them with our hands as day progressed. At noon we have trudged for a little while side by side

together; but in the afternoon we lag, and the young men and women, our sons and daughters, are eager to get on. We can help them no longer; they are now more vigorous than we; they will not stay if we ask them, and we would not stay them if we might. So we take them to our breasts, and kiss them and weep over them, and let them go. And when they have passed out of sight, we look back on the road over which they have come with us. It is our first great backward look in life, and we think of all their endearing words and pretty ways.

These memories are the harvest of our parenthood, and the broken toys we pick up and treasure in our bosoms are more powerful amulets against unworthiness in ourselves than all the platitudes and codes of man.

As the Countess stood there, looking at her son, she saw him passing away from her as a shadow passes across a blind. One by one the tears rolled down her face, and at last she cried out in a broken voice,

‘O, my son, my son!’ stretching out her arms for him as she spoke.

After the first few years of her married life, the utmost cruelty and neglect of the Earl, had never been able to bring a tear into the steadfast fearless eye of Lady Berkham.

When her two children had been born, and when she had discovered the worthlessness of the man to whom she had been married, she then threw her womanhood behind her—as far as he was concerned—and became an Amazon defending her young.

She would not quail before him, because if she did, her children might suffer. He, who was the natural protector of her and her babes, had become their unnatural enemy; and she alone was capable of fight. To admit in any way that she was afraid of him, would be to abandon her young ones to their enemy; and therefore she stood up against him, as one man stands up against another.

She never defied him, for she knew if she did, he would have the law on his side. She never showed him that she feared him, for she knew if he suspected that, he would push her away from even the guardianship of her children.

She had cared nothing for herself; her own life was gone, squandered; she had married a man she did not love, and now she had a husband whom she despised.

She had loved her children with a love that knew no stint or question; and now, a few years it seemed to her, since she had rocked her boy to sleep upon her bosom, he had ceased to confide in her, and apparently thought no more of her than he did of his father, against whom she had fought for her boy all his life.

When Lord Balehouse heard his mother's cry it smote him to the heart, and he went to her and put his arm round her and whispered words of affection in her ear. Half an hour ago the thought that his transaction with Pollock might meet her ears, would have filled him with dismay. Now, not only was it known to her, but it had reached her from his own lips. But he had no self-reproach over the confession, whatever visitings of conscience he may have suffered over his realisation of

the thing itself. He had borrowed the money, and he was sorry for that, but he was angry at the memory of how it came about that he had been compelled to borrow the money, and anger is one of the most self-sustaining of all the passions. If his father had been a kind and indulgent father he would have been overcome with shame. But as things stood, he felt no more compunction because of the Earl than because of Baker. But to lessen himself in his mother's estimation would have caused him pain, and to have given her reasonable cause for grief would have filled him with consternation. And yet a few seconds ago he had done both. But he had not spoken recklessly. He admitted to himself, and would have admitted to any other man, that he did not think himself as wise as Solomon in all things. In this one parti-

cular instance he would have admitted to no man that even Solomon could have acted with greater judgment.

Lord Balehouse was not what discerning people would call an intellectual man, but he had a certain stock of common sense, which, in the ordinary affairs of life, is of more service than what is, in stupid contradiction to common sense, called intellect. He felt at the moment that what was wanted was a shock, and not only a shock, but a shock which would, in a way, produce a reversal. He felt that if war against the Earl was to be carried on, it would be essential that he should go into the combat with a mind unembarrassed. Before he had spoken, things looked their very blackest for his mother and Nora. They were both to go to London at this unusual time of the year ; they were to separate from him, and

by the concealment of his affair with Pollock his action would have been, at best, materially impeded. At the worst, what had he to fear from his confession? At the very worst, the anger of the Earl. And what did he care for his father's anger? Nothing. But then, there was his mother. She would be displeased. No doubt of that. But then, by this open declaration, he should be so much more free to take up the cudgels for her than if any doubt had lain over the transaction.

Now he had nothing to conceal from his father, and he did not care a brass farthing about him.

He had no feeling one way or another about Mr. Pollock. He neither liked nor disliked him. Of him he had borrowed two thousand pounds, but not by any personal favour, but through the influence of Jervais,

if for that loan he had to be grateful to any one. If he had not had his captain's letter of introduction, he might have whistled for the two thousand.

But if he had no feeling for or against Pollock, there was one thing he was quite sure of, namely, that so long as he could lift voice or arm against it, Pollock should never marry Nora against Nora's wish, and he knew Nora's decision would always be against Pollock.

Besides all these considerations, Lord Balehouse had an intention, which he determined to carry into action before Pollock left Berkham.

When the Earl saw that, in the present interview, he had fully asserted his marital power, that he had signified to the Countess his wishes, and that no further advantage

could be gained by him in prolonging the scene, he made up his mind to bring it to a close at once. So, when he saw his son cross the room and put his arm round the Countess, he turned to Pollock, and said,

‘Come, Pollock, we have seen a good deal of the castle and its folk, but not quite all yet. Let us go now and try if there is anything else worth looking at.’

Turning to his son, he said,

‘Oliver, I shall be in the library at five o’clock, and should like to see you for a few minutes there, if you can find it your convenience to come.’

Lord Balehouse bowed, and said,

‘I shall be there, my lord.’

And then mother and son were left alone.

Then mother and son had a long talk,

in which she began by reproaching him. He then explained how it was he had come to be in debt, and to borrow money of Mr. Pollock, and to confess the debt as he had; and she forgot all her former tears when thinking of the goodness of her only son in thus braving everything by that confession with the simple view of befriending Nora, and, through Nora, herself.

‘You saw, mother,’ said the young man, ‘how I completely disarmed my father. When I spoke first I did not know what course events would take, but I counted on one thing. I knew very well that if my father had been in my position he would never have made the confession I made. I knew that in some way or other it would disturb his calculations, and at the moment I could think of nothing better than upsetting his calculations, whatever they might

have been. You were not angry with me, mother ?

‘No, my dear boy ; but I was deeply grieved to think of your going into debt. It seemed—it seemed so like—so like—’

‘So like what, mother ?’

‘So like your father, dear Oliver.’

‘Ah, but it wasn’t like my father ! My father never borrows money to pay his debts. He borrows money to spend. He borrows money when people will not give him any more credit.’

‘My dear boy, you are young, and do not know anything of business yet. You talk like a child. Take my advice, and be like a child. A child borrows money neither to pay its debts nor to spend foolishly.’

After a little more talk, Lord Balehouse

left his mother ; and as he trod the lonely stone passage, he wondered what his father would say to him, and how Mr. Pollock would take what he had to say to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN LOVE IS BUSINESS.

WHEN the time appointed for the interview came, Lord Balehouse sought his father. He found him, for the first time in his life, in a mood bordering on amiability. The son was a simple, straightforward gentleman. He had no faculty of penetrating schemes or of scheming himself. He gave all people he met credit for the very best intentions. He carried into practice the theory of the English law, that every man is innocent until he is proved guilty. But once a man had been convicted, he would have no more to do with that man. He cast him off once and for ever. To his mind his father had been long since found

guilty, and he cast off from himself all allegiance of love to his father.

The Earl, on the other hand, was full of wiles. He had the nature of a pettifogging attorney. His was a subtle, crafty, selfish nature. He did not kick people unless he could kick them with impunity.

Lord Berkham would kick no waiters, if there were any chance of the waiters finding their way into the bill. But if he had slaves he would kick them now and then because he was angry, now and then for pastime. He had no slaves, but he had a wife and children, the nearest thing we have in this country to slaves. Literally, kicking his wife and children was out of the question. But he could treat them ill, and he had treated them ill, had treated them as badly as he could.

‘Oliver,’ said the Earl, pointing to an

easy-chair opposite his own, 'I want to have a talk with you.'

Lord Balehouse threw himself into the chair and nodded his head gravely to his father.

'One day, Oliver, you will stand in my shoes. You will own the place all round here, but very little more. You will be no better than nominal master of the estate. You will be as poor as a rat. The place is dipped as deep as it can be dipped. When I am dead you will have three thousand a year on which to live, and keep up the family position.'

The Earl paused for a word from his son, but the latter only bowed again in token that he followed his father's words.

'What do you say?' asked the Earl.

'Your lordship is aware I already know what your lordship has told me?'

‘Yes. But how shall you like to be poor? How do you like to be poor now—eh?’

‘Not at all.’

‘Well, then, suppose I show you how you can wipe off that two thousand pounds you borrowed of Pollock, and at the same time double your allowance; would you not feel very much obliged to me?’

‘If you will pay that two thousand pounds, and double my allowance, I shall be considerably relieved.’

‘You know very well I haven’t got two thousand shillings. You are only sneering at me for my pains, sir.’

‘Indeed I am not, my lord. I am saying to you what I mean.’

‘But you know I am a pauper, and that I haven’t the price of a third-class ticket to town.’

‘And you, my lord, know equally well that I can do nothing which will enable you to do this, unless, indeed, you are referring to a subject which I thought dead and buried between us. I mean my joining you in further mortgages.’

‘No, no, no.’

‘Then, my lord, what is it? Speak plainly.’

‘If your sister Nora will marry Mr. Pollock he will clear the estate, and I will pay your debts and double your allowance. He will make a princely settlement on her, and she will have the richest husband and finest house in London.’

‘I am sure it is exceedingly handsome of Mr. Pollock. The most handsome offer ever made, I should think.’

‘I should think so. I am delighted you agree with me.’

‘And what does Nora say, my lord?’

‘What does Nora say? Why, of course she’ll do what I think right. What *we* think right, Oliver.’

‘But has she said so?’

‘Said so? No, of course not. But she will say so. There has been, I believe, some girlish nonsense going on between young Southwood and your sister. But a thing of that kind cannot be allowed to stand in the way of business. People in our position cannot afford to marry for love. Now look at me. Do you think I married for love?’

‘No, my lord. Nor do I suppose my mother did either.’

‘Oliver, Oliver, you are impertinent; but I will forgive you. You are with me in this affair about Nora. You agree that love, as people call it in romances, ought not to interfere with business?’

‘But how will you manage, my lord, when love is business?’

‘I do not understand you, and I don’t think you understand yourself.’

‘What I call business now in my life, is attending to my military duties, and attending to my affairs generally, drawing my money and—borrowing another man’s money. That’s what I call the business of my life.’

‘Well, well, what has this to do with what we are talking about?’

‘But, my lord, if I were in love, and thought of getting married, I should think my love and my getting married the chief business of that time.’

‘And so, of course, they would be.’

‘Then, my lord, I should allow no other kind of business to interfere.’

‘Eh! what? I don’t understand you. Say that again.’

‘I say if I were in love, and thought of marriage, I should think (and your lordship has said you would agree with me) that my love and marriage were the most important business of my life; and I should not allow any other affairs, such as the settlements another person might make, or the amount of debts another person might pay off. I should think of only the person I wished to marry. Have I made myself plain, my lord?’

‘Oliver,’ shouted the Earl, starting to his feet, and flushing purple — ‘Oliver, you are a fool!’

‘Your lordship will be good enough to remember I am not responsible for the fact that I am your son;’ and with these words he walked out of the room.

The Earl stamped and stormed and flung the things about.

For a quarter of an hour he fumed and raged like a maniac. Then exhaustion set in, and he lay down on the floor and cursed himself with the little breath he had left.

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